BIG COMIC SUPERIOR

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19.野心と恋と

第一話　死の予告　5
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第六話　羅刹の到着　159
第七話　羅刹の験し　189

DEATH
WARNING

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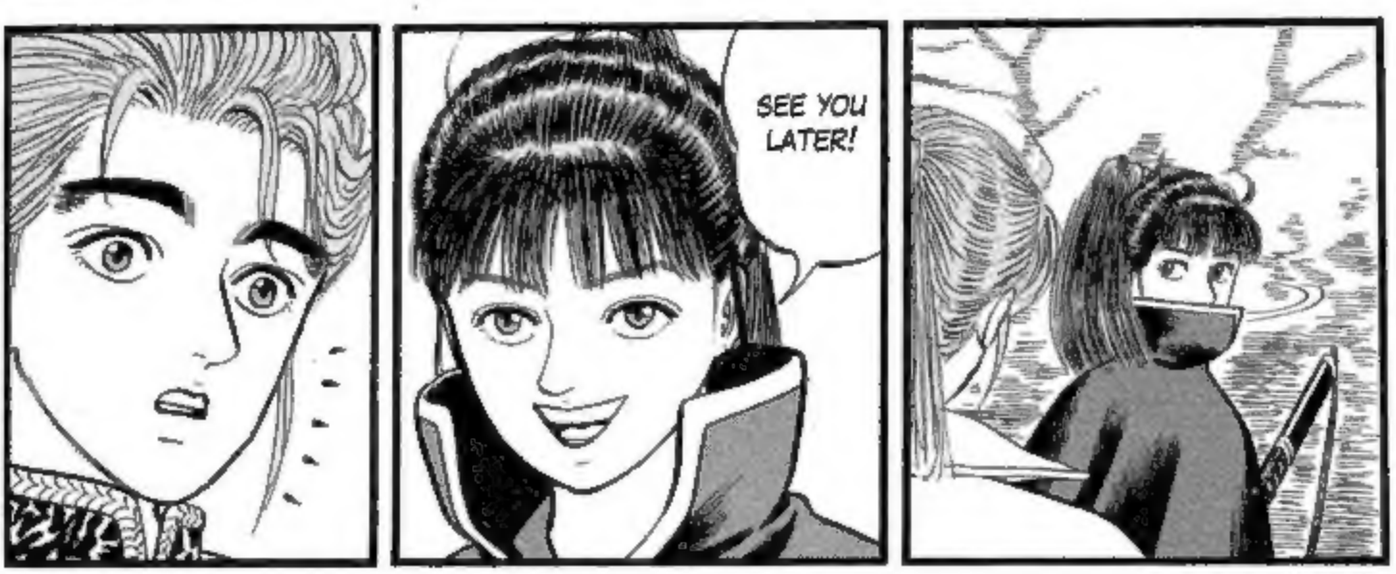
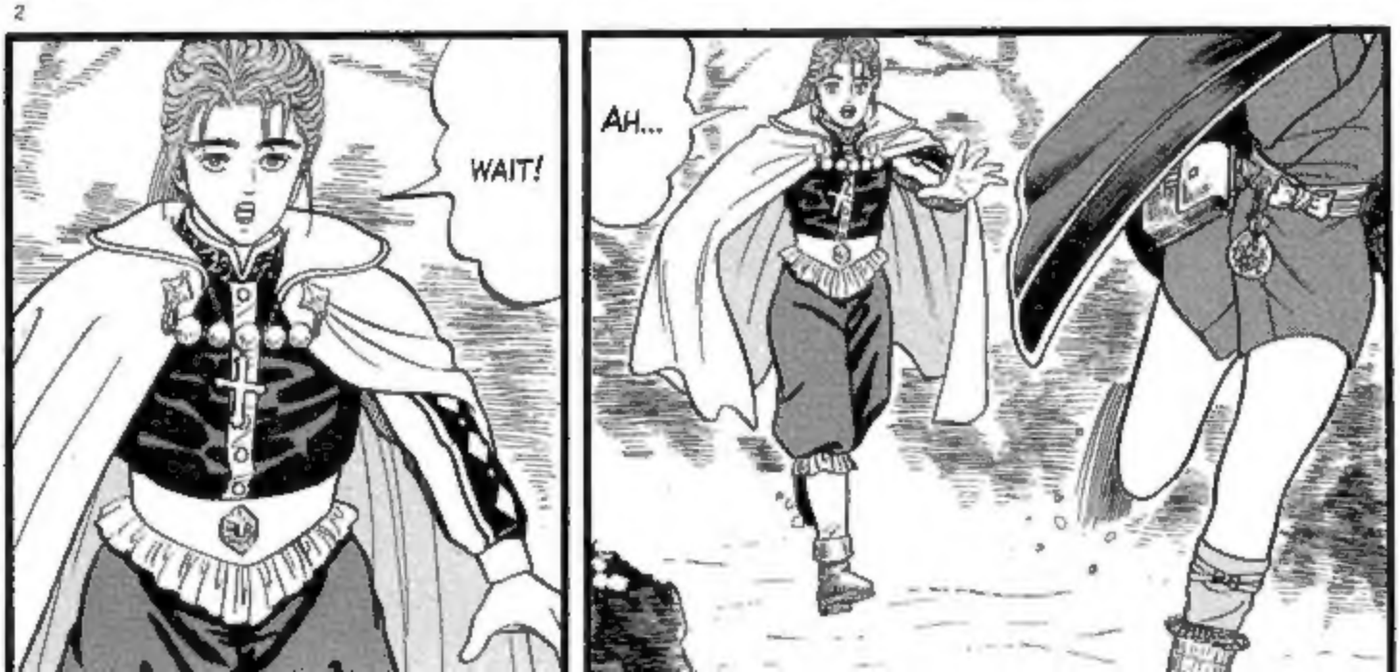
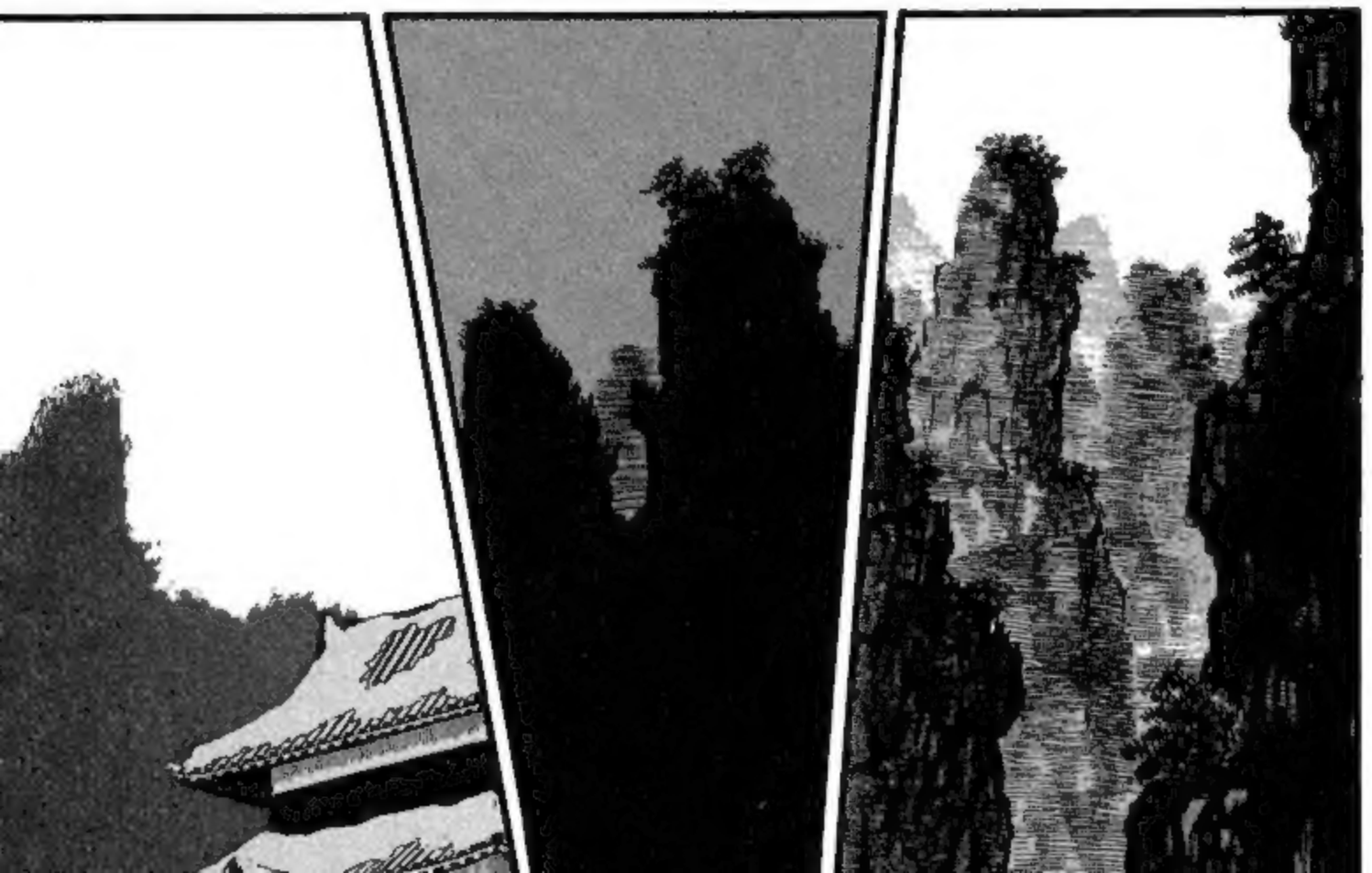

SEE YOU LATER!


WAIT!
AH...

EH...
?!
LATER?
SEE YOU...
.....



A YOUNG GIRL IN STRANGE CLOTHING IS COMING.
HUH?
OHH!
IS SHE WEARING A KATANA?

THIS GIRL IS
THE LADY AZUMI.

FROM... A CERTAIN NOBLE PRINCESS
IN A DIFFERENT COUNTRY.
A SECRET CHILD WHO WAS BORN
A RELATIVE OF OUR LORD.
AND A FOREIGN MISSIONARY.

I'M TOLD THAT TO PROTECT HER, SHE WAS EVEN TAUGHT THE WAYS OF THE SWORD.
AND AZUMI-DONO WAS RAISED IN SECRET UNDER A DISTANT RELATIVE'S CARE.
AFTER SHE WAS BORN, HER MOTHER BECAME A NUN.

THE LORD WONDERED IF IT WASN'T THE BEST CHOICE FOR HER TO LIVE IN THIS FIEF...
AND SINCE SHE'S A CHRISTIAN AS WELL,
...BUT NOW THAT SHE'S REACHED ADOLESC-ENCE,

NO, SHE'S GOING TO LIVE AT THE CASTLE... TODAY, I WANTED FOR HER TO GET ACQUAINTED WITH YOU ALL...
HERE!? SHE'S GONNA LIVE HERE!?

AND SO SHE WAS SUMMONED HERE.

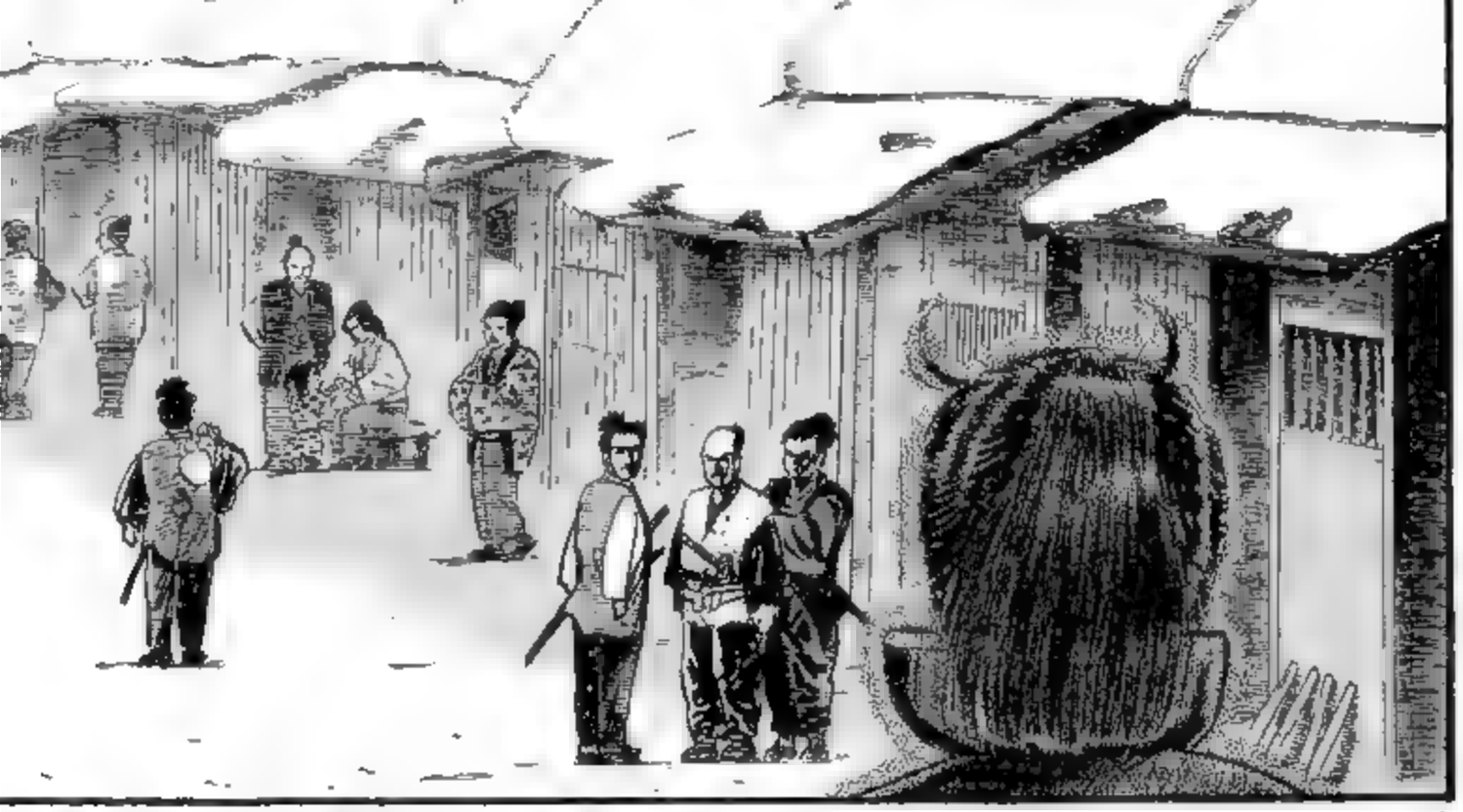
MY, OH MY...
OOOH.

I AM TERASAWA GENSAI.
LIKE-WISE.
IT'S AN HONOR TO MEET YOU.
MY NAME'S AZUMI.
I AM YAMAGUCHI NOBUTSUNA.
KURODA TAKE-TORA.
AND HE'S THE INHUMAN-LY STRONG MIKI UEMON.
I GIVE YOU...
AND I'M KURI-SUKE!
HAYASHI MATABEE !!!

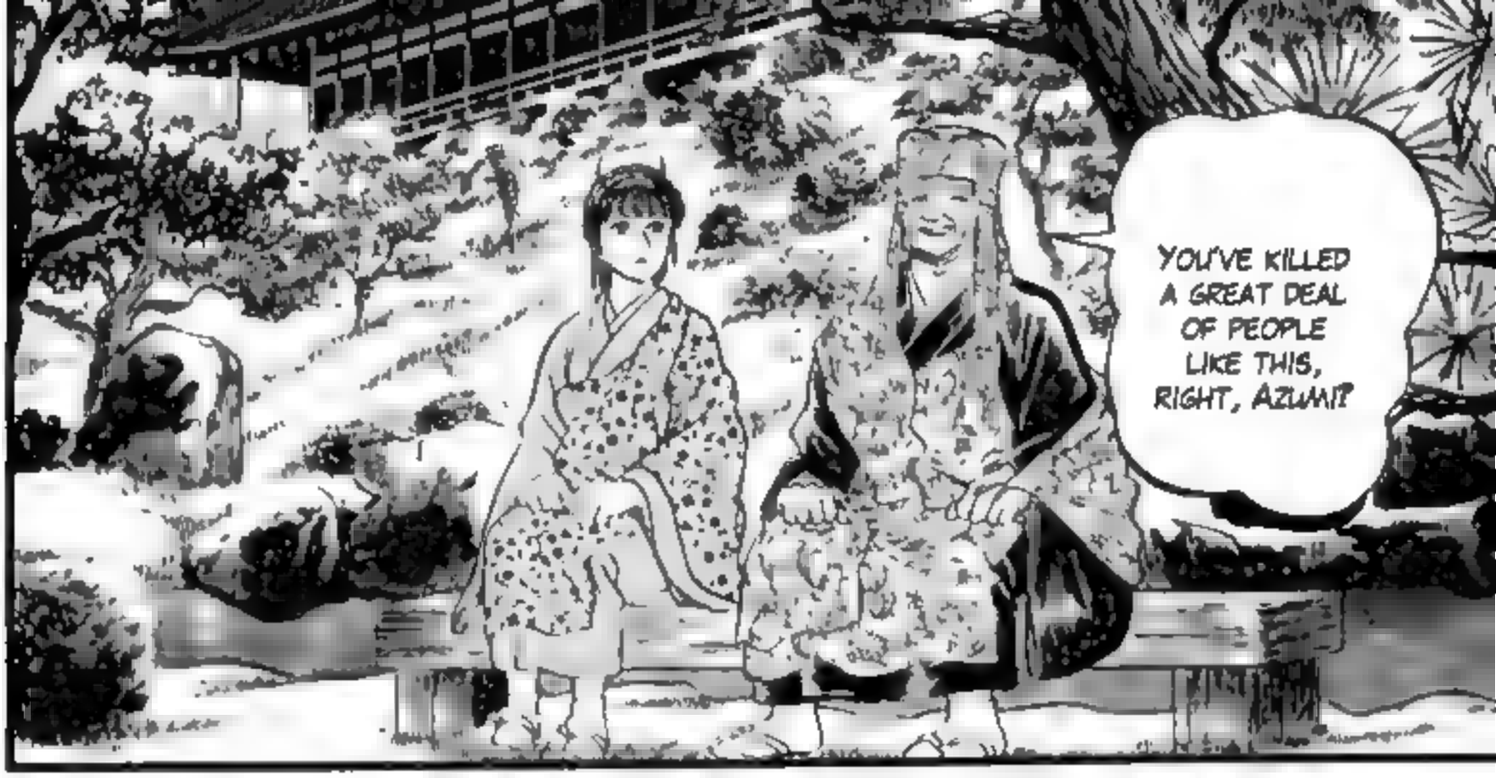
THEY'RE BOTH SUPER STROOONG!
SAGAWA SOZABURO AND TODO SHIRO.

SO THESE... ARE THE ONES IN CHARGE...

SO OVER THERE... THOSE ARE THE HOMES OF OTHER PEOPLE?
THAT'S RIGHT



REMNANTS OF THE TOYOTOMI SIDE AFTER THE SIEGE OF OSAKA, RETAINERS OF DAIMYO WHO'S RANK WAS CHANGED...
SAMURAI BARRED FROM THE SHOGUNATE'S SERVICE,
ONCE AGAIN... THEY'RE FLOODING THE COUNTRY.
THE SHOGUNATE WON'T LIFT A FINGER TO HELP THEM.
IT'S THE SAME AS TELLING THEM TO VANISH.
THEY GROUP TOGETHER, THEY BECOME BANDS OF NOBUSERI AND EVEN COMMIT ATROCIOUS ACTS.....IT'S THE SAD, NATURAL CONCLUSION...


YOU'VE KILLED A GREAT DEAL OF PEOPLE LIKE THIS, RIGHT, AZUMI?

I JOINED A GROUP OF NOBUSERI...
I HAVE ONLY THIS AS A WAY TO LIVE!
YES.
AND I KILED... SO MANY OF THOSE PEOPLE...
THAT'S RIGHT... FROM THEIR POINT OF VIEW...THEY HAD NO OTHER WAY TO GO ON LIVING...

NO DAIMYO EXISTS WHO COULD EMPLOY SUCH A NUMBER OF PEOPLE.
SAVE FOR ONE.
ONE DOES EXIST...

THAT TOOK IN SEVERAL RONIN...
UNITED THEM.. AND YET NO REVOLTS TOOK PLACE!
IT'S EVEN SAID THEY'RE ECONOMICALLY STABLE.
ONLY ONE FIEF PRODUCED SUCH A MIRACLE.
EH!? IS IT TRUE?!

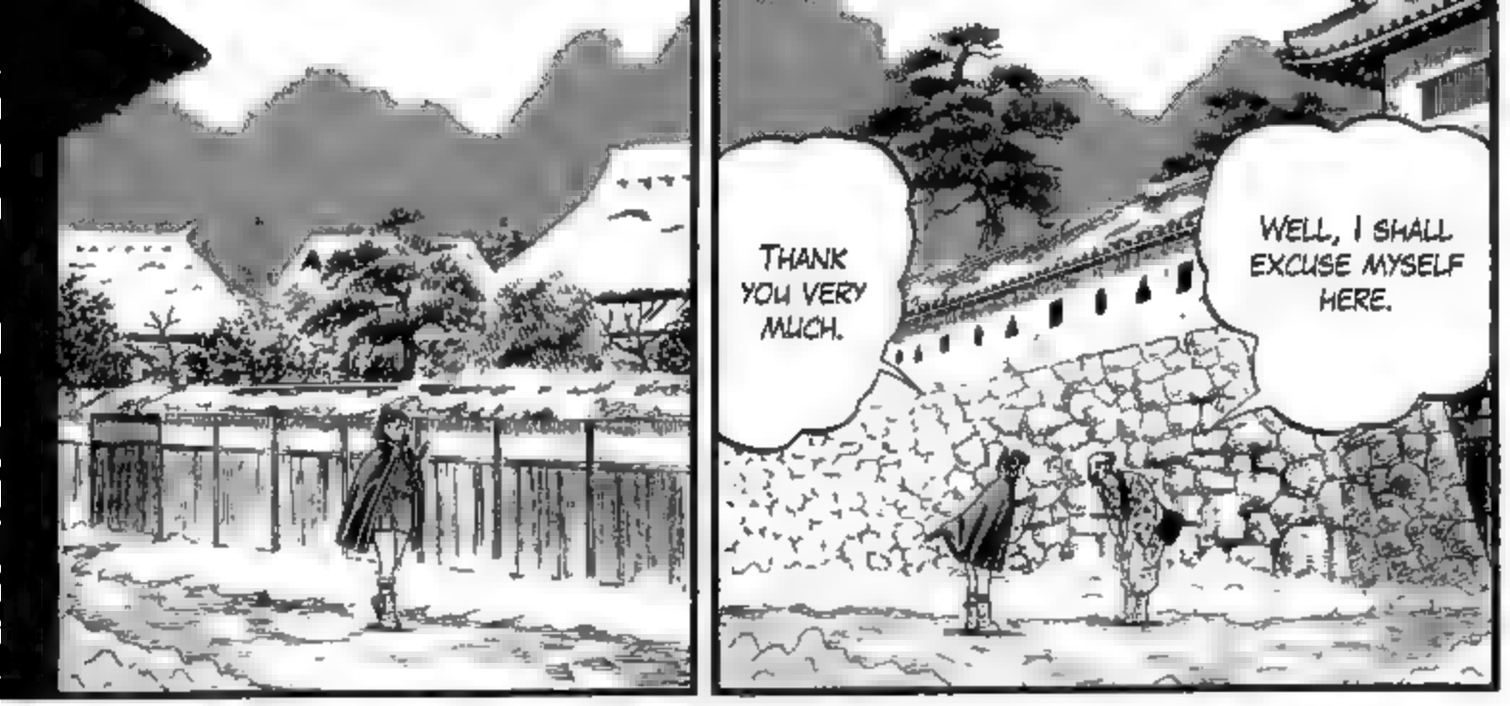
IF THIS FACT WERE TO BECOME KNOWN TO SHOGUN HIDETADA, DOI TOSHIKATSU OR THE CABINET OFFICIALS...THEY WOULD CERTAINLY DESTROY IT IMMEDIATELY!!
.....

IN OTHER WORDS,
IT IS A SECRET! A SECRET! A SEEEECRET,
OR ELSE THEY WOULD BE IN IMMEDIATE PERIL.
.....

THAT IS WHY I SUPPORT THEM IN SECRET!

.....
AZUMI-DONO?

YES.


THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
WELL, I SHALL EXCUSE MYSELF HERE.

I'M SURE...THOSE FOUR SAID THAT THEY'RE GONNA BE AT THAT MANSION FOR TWO OR THREE DAYS...
WELL THEN.

KAGARI,
TZUD-ZORA...
IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE I'VE HAD OTHER COMRADES!
WOW!!!
UTSU-BO!
HATS-UNE,

FIRST OF ALL... AS THE NEW-COMER...I SHOULD THANK THEM SOMEHOW!
OOOOH! WHAT A FEAST HERE!
DID YOU MAKE ALL OF THIS, AZUMI-SAN!?
I WAS ABLE TO HAVE COMRADES ONCE AGAIN!
あはは
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OKAY!

EH EH!
I'M HOME !!
EVERYONE!! I'LL BE THE ONE PREPARING A FEAST FOR DINNER WITH ALL MY MIGHT,
LOOK FORWARD TO IT!

HM?
WAIT!

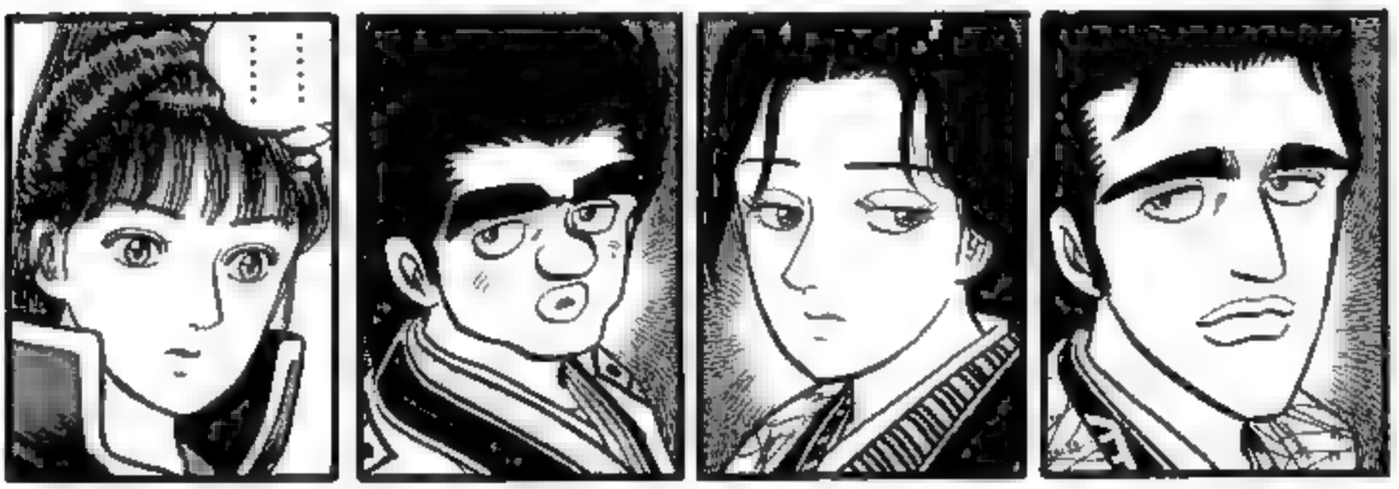
WE'VE COME
TO A POINT WHERE WE WERE FINALLY
ABLE TO SLIP RIGHT INTO
THE RONIN GROUP, OR AMONG THE COMMONERS,
WHILE IN DISGUISE, ACTING AND PUTTING IN EFFORT.

HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT ALREADY!?
WERE BROUGHT TO THE CASTLE BY THE CHIEF VASSAL AND SUDDENLY INTRODUCED TO THE RONIN GROUP'S BOSSES...
BUT YOU, AZUMI-DONO..

THAT AZUMI-DONO ARRIVED HERE WITH DIFFERENT ORDERS FROM US...
THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT
I'VE ALREADY INFILTRATED THAT RONIN GROUP, Y'KNOW.

IT MEANS THERE'S A SECRET ORDER SHE CAN'T TELL US ABOUT...
.....
.....
WELL ...

AZUMI-DONO HAS BEEN RECEIVING SPECIAL TREATMENT SINCE FROM THE START.
NOT GOOD... STILL TOO EARLY TO TELL THEM.


.....

I REFUSE. I DON'T CONSIDER YOU MY COMRADE.

I'LL PASS ON THAT FEAST, TOO.

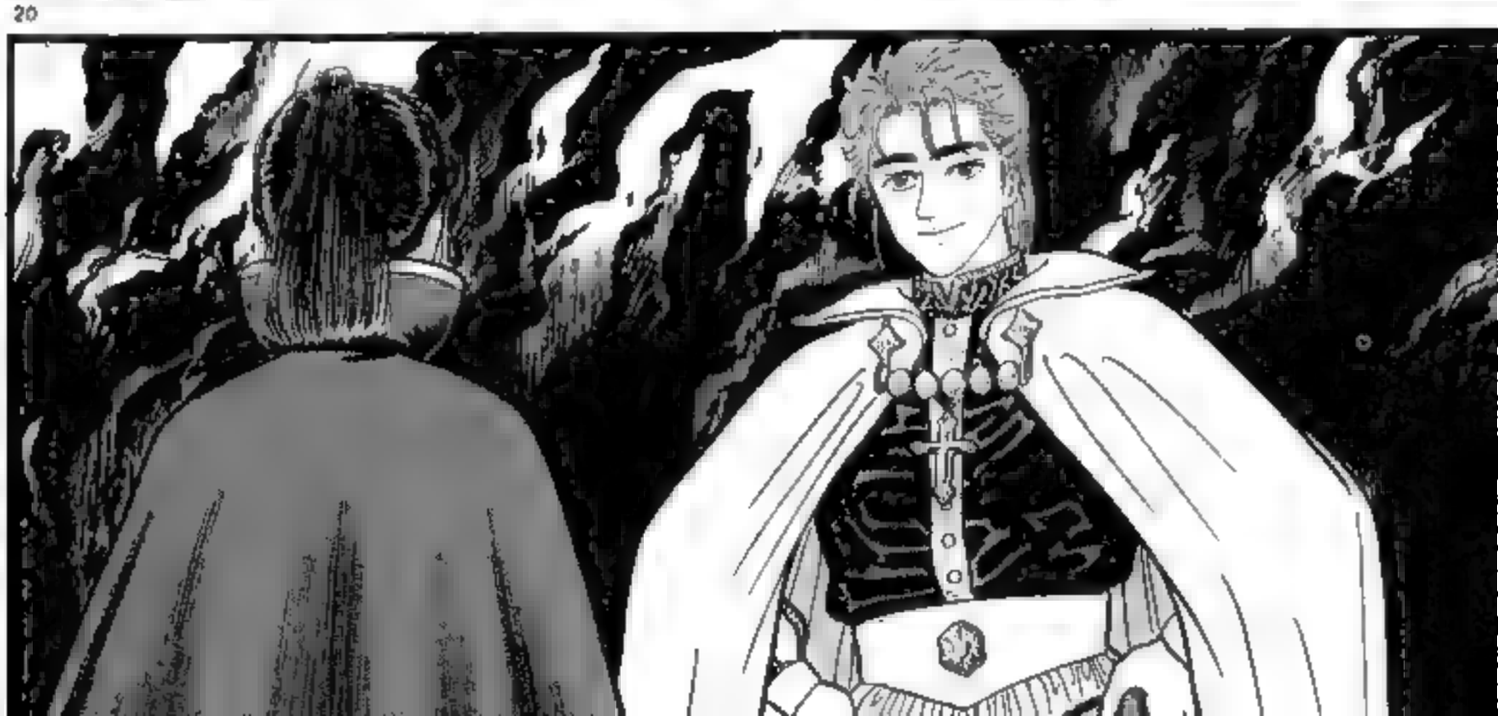
WHY DON'T WE HAVE A CALM TALK WHILE WE ENJOY DINNER?
LOOK ..

18

.....
SO COLD...
LET'S GO BACK.
19
I DIDN'T FEEL THAT PRESENCE!

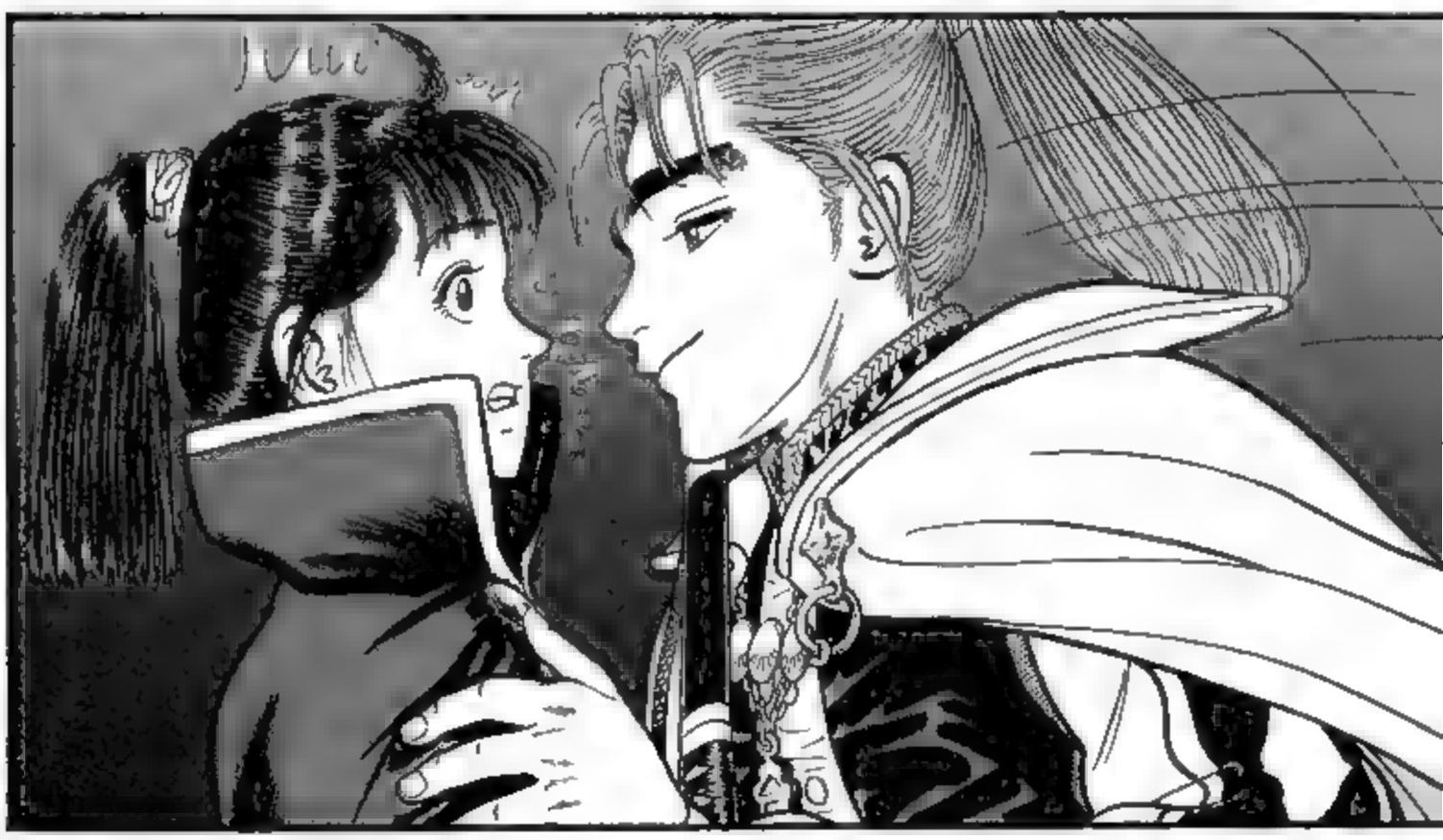
ストッ

AND THIS MAN MANAGED TO HIDE HIS PRESENCE FROM ME!?
THAT'S NOT LIKE ME! I WAS SPACING OUT!

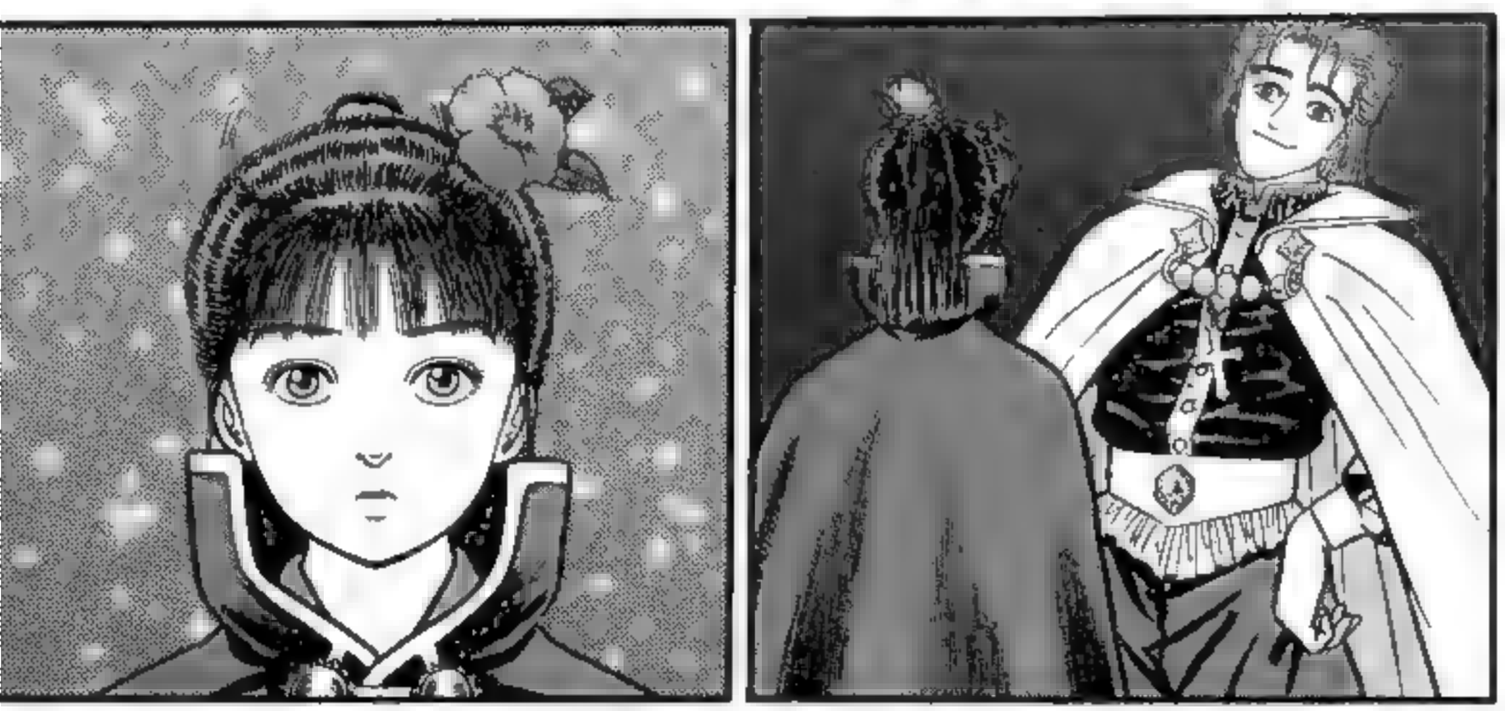


!?

AHHH. .

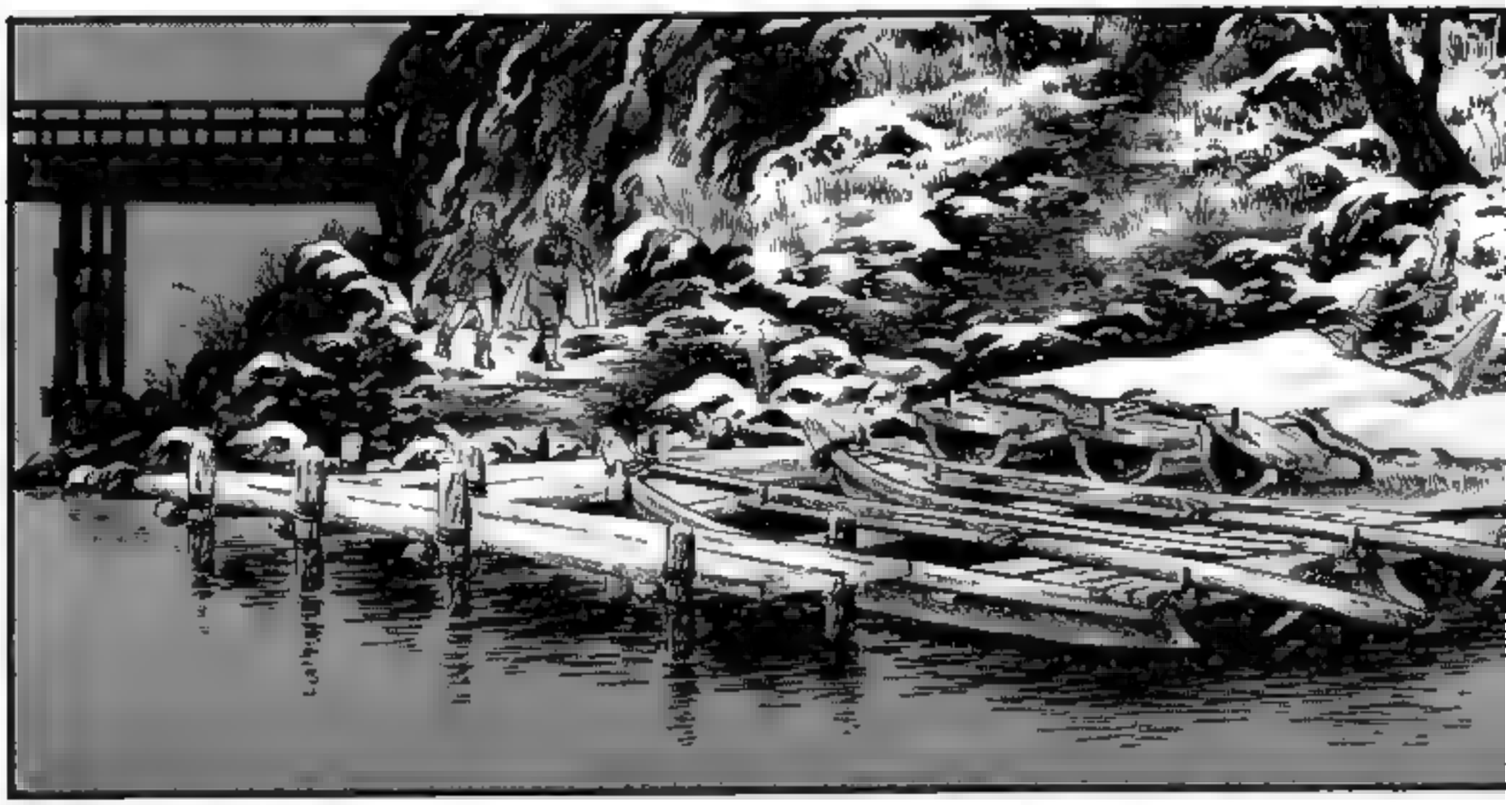


WHAT ARE YOU DOING!?



COME!

.....



IT'LL BE FUN!

ARE WE RIDING A BOAT?

A LORD'S RELATIVE, A PRINCESS WITH NOBLE BLOOD, A CHRISTIAN, A SECRET CHILD...
AZUMI-DONO, IF I'M NOT MISTAKEN ?

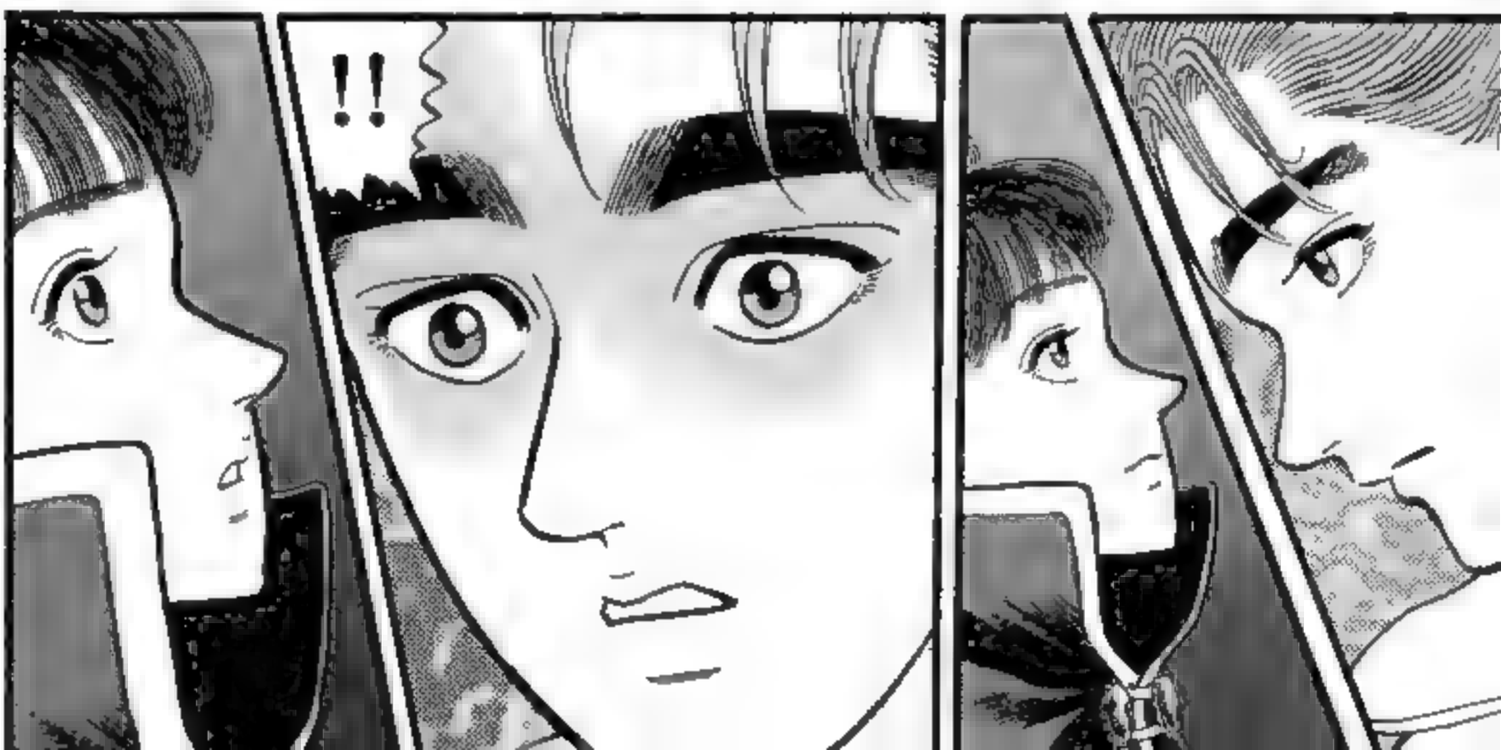
ALL LIES, NO?
!!
I KNOW NOTHING OF THE TIME I WAS LITTLE!
I WAS TOLD ALL OF THAT.
YES.
A FINE ANSWER.

MANY MEN WITH THAT SWORD...
YOU HAVE SLAIN
.....
WHY WOULD YOU THINK SUCH A THING?
.....
!!

AND...WHAT THEY WILL DO IN THE FUTURE.
HOW THE PEOPLE BEFORE ME HAVE LIVED UNTIL THIS POINT.
I CAN CLEARLY SEE

YOU CAN SEE INTO THE FUTURE?
.....

WHAT MY FUTURE HOLDS!
I WANT YOU TO TELL ME
OOOOH...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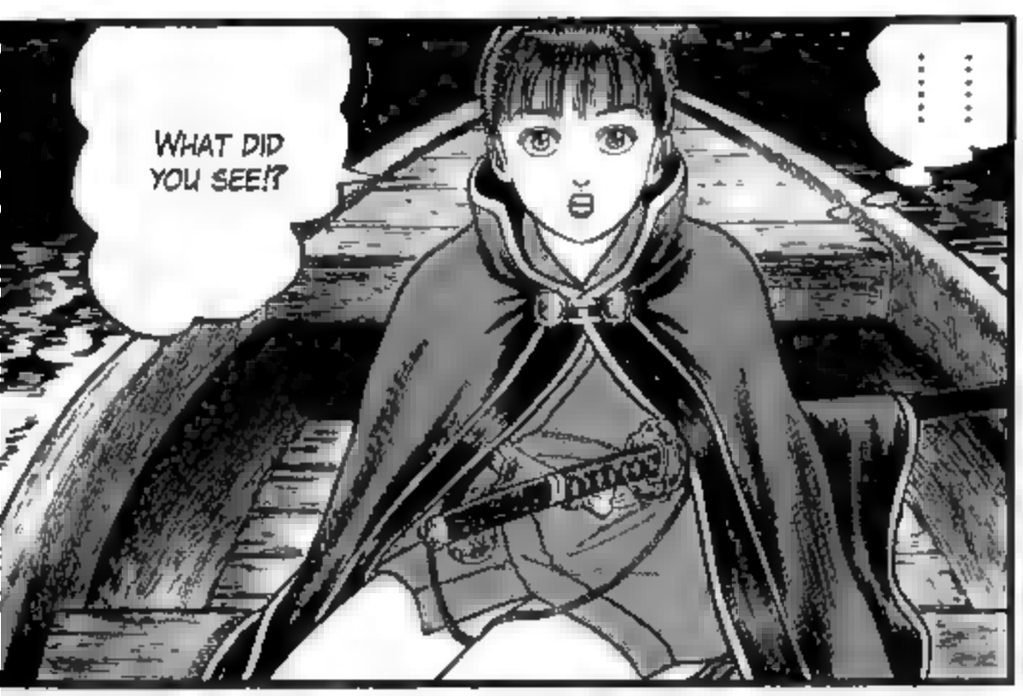
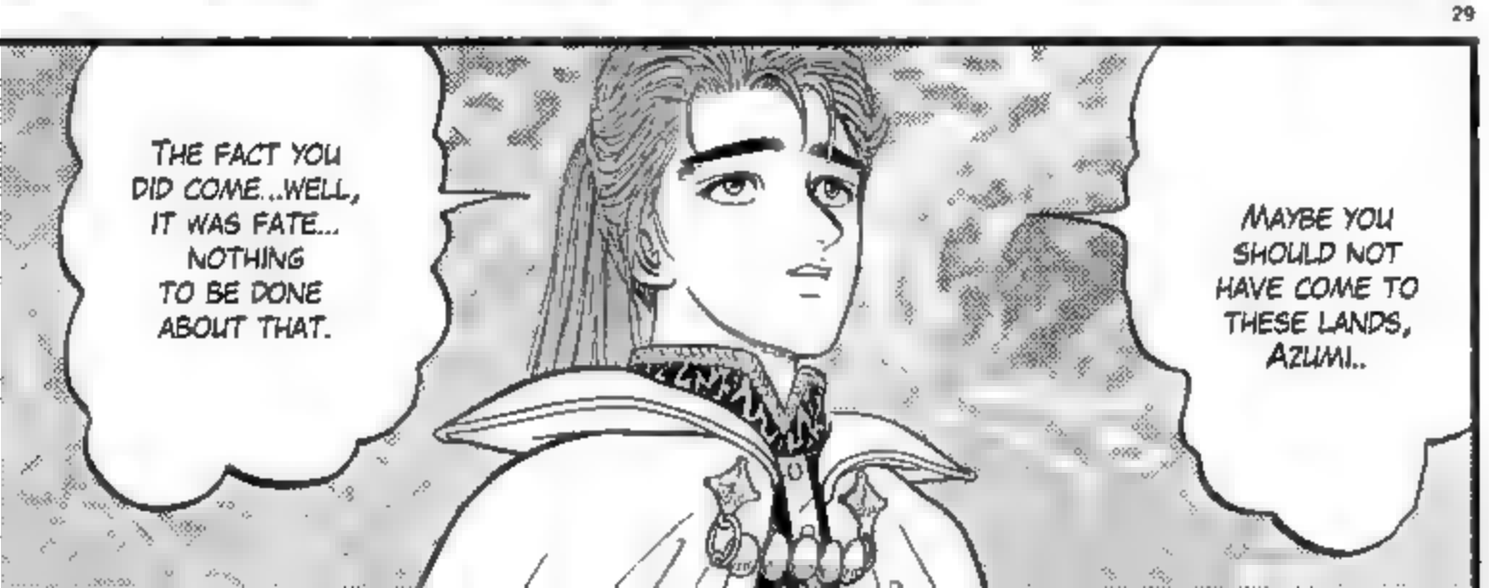
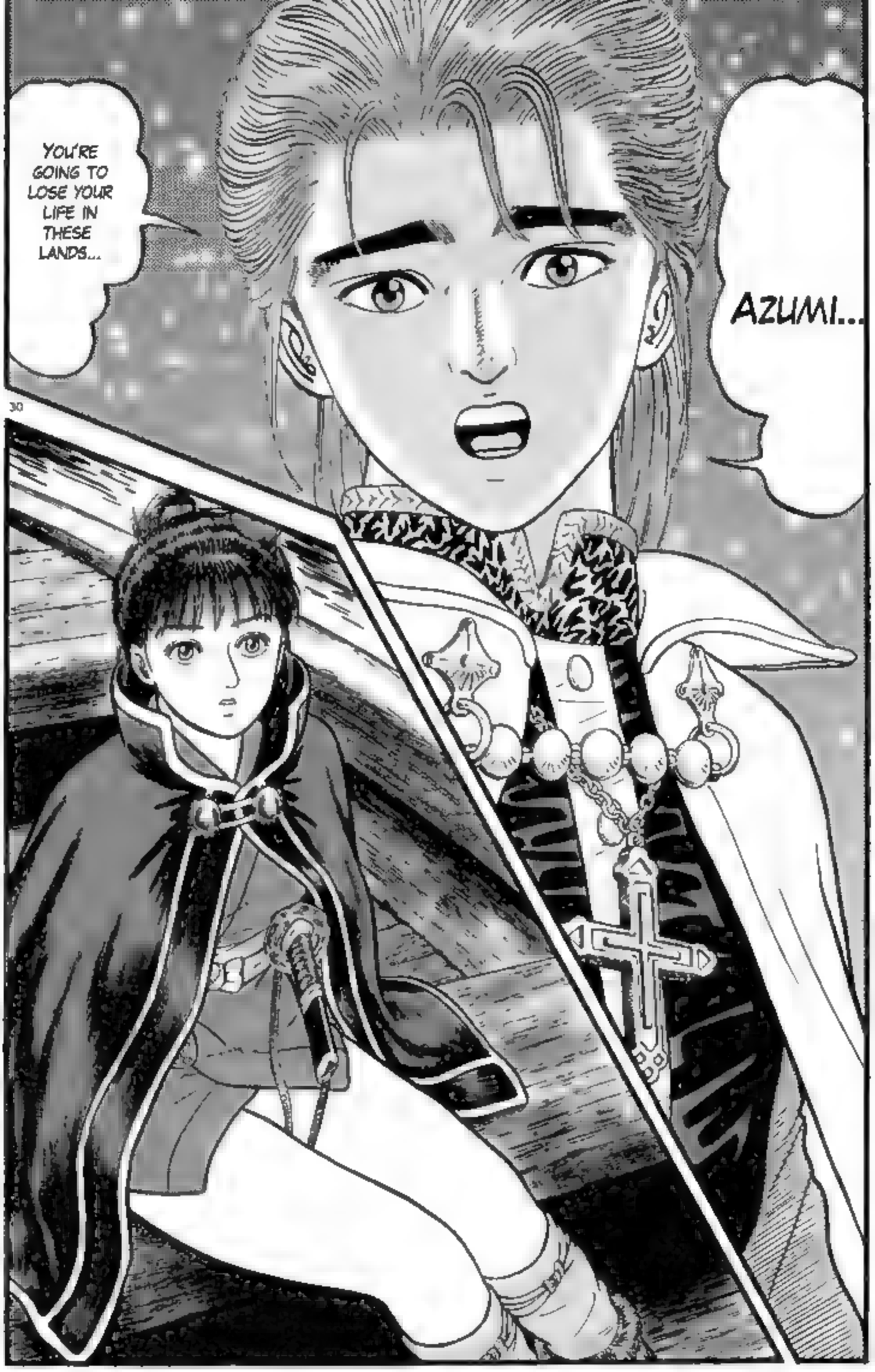

.....
WHAT DID YOU SEE!?

BY WHATEVER YOU HEAR, RIGHT?
SOMEONE LIKE YOU, AZUMI, SHOULDN'T BE FLUSTERED


THE FACT YOU DID COME...WELL, IT WAS FATE... NOTHING TO BE DONE ABOUT THAT.
MAYBE YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE COME TO THESE LANDS, AZUMI..


YOU'RE GOING TO LOSE YOUR LIFE IN THESE LANDS...
AZUMI...

CHAPTER 2:
SEEDS OF
REVOLT

THE SWORD SKILLS YOU TAUGHT ME WERE SUPPOSED TO BE USED FOR THE MISSIONS TO PROTECT THE PEACE OF A LOT OF PEOPLE, AND STOPPING WARS FROM HAPPENING...
I'M SORRY, GRAMPA...

I'M SORRY..
ARE YOU MAD!?
D-DID YOU SEE THAT?
I'VE BEEN TAKING AWAY A LOT OF LIVES WITH THIS SWORD! ONLY TO STAY ALIVE!
NOW, I...
BUT NOW ...

DON'T LET IT BOTHER YOU! YOU HAD TO STAY ALIVE! DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT!
WE'VE BEEN ALWAYS WATCHING!! DON'T WORRY!! YOU'RE REALLY STRONG!!

DO YOUR BEST, AZUMI!

AREN'T YOU TRYING TO CARRY OUT A HUGE MISSION!?
AND MORE-OVER, IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME!

YOU KNOW TENKAI-SAMA!
BUT THEY'RE RONIN WHO ALL HAD THEIR DOMAINS STOLEN FROM THEM! THEY DON'T HAVE THE MEANS TO SURVIVE ON THEIR OWN, AND THEY'RE FLOODING INTO THE NATION...I EVEN KILLED A LOT OF THOSE PEOPLE... BUT....

OHHH! FIRST TIME I'VE SEEN THE SNOW!
HE DOESN'T NEED TO HEAR YOU EXPLAIN! GRAMPA KNOWS EVERYTHING!
ACCEPTED MANY OF THESE PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES AND THEY'RE LIVING IN THESE LANDS IN SECRET FROM THE SHOGUNATE.
OOOH, IT'S COLD!

OH, I WONDER IF THOSE RONIN WON'T TRY TO CAUSE SOME TROUBLE!

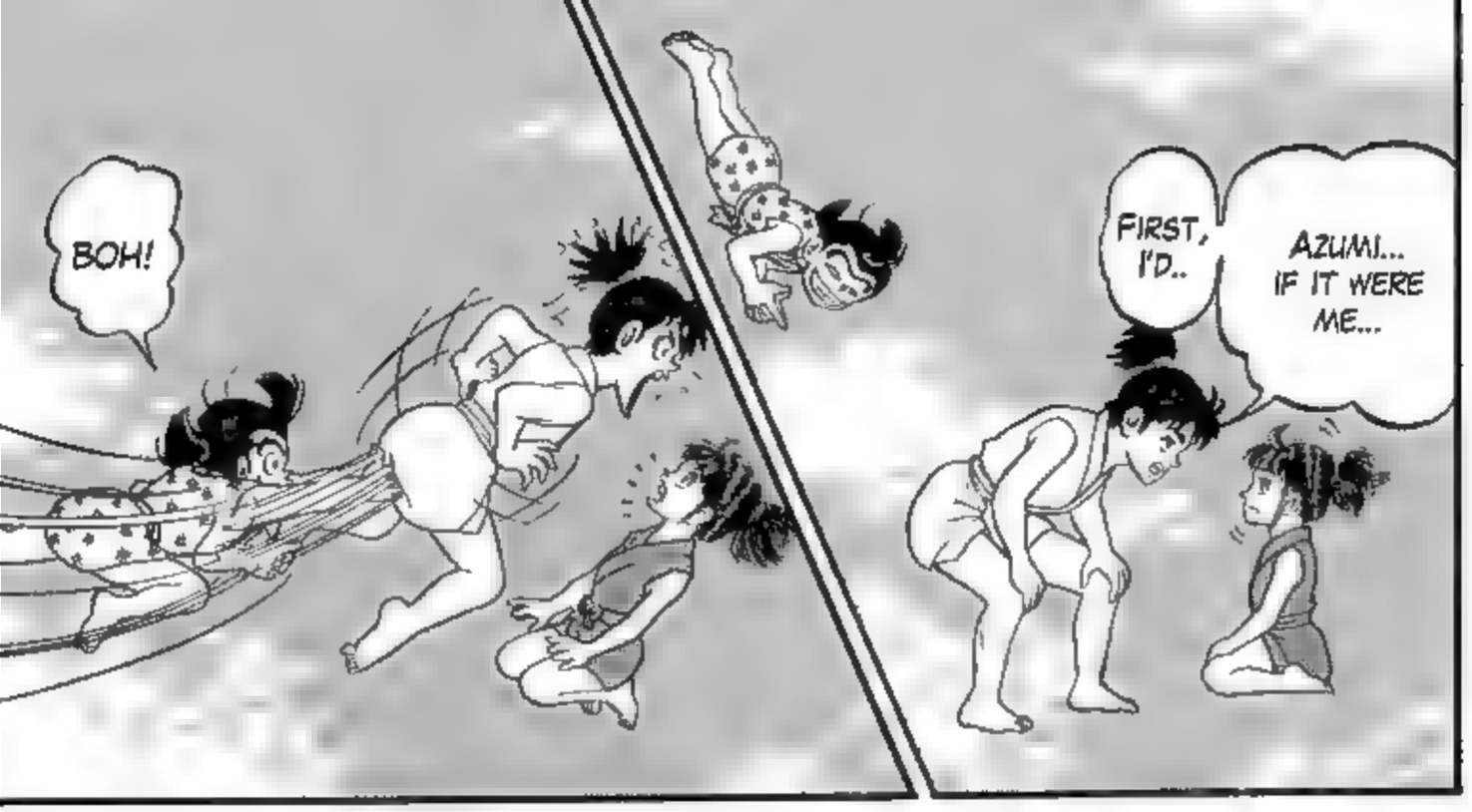
WELL, AZUMI, YOU MUST PROTECT THIS FIEF SO THAT IT DOESN'T GET DESTROYED!!

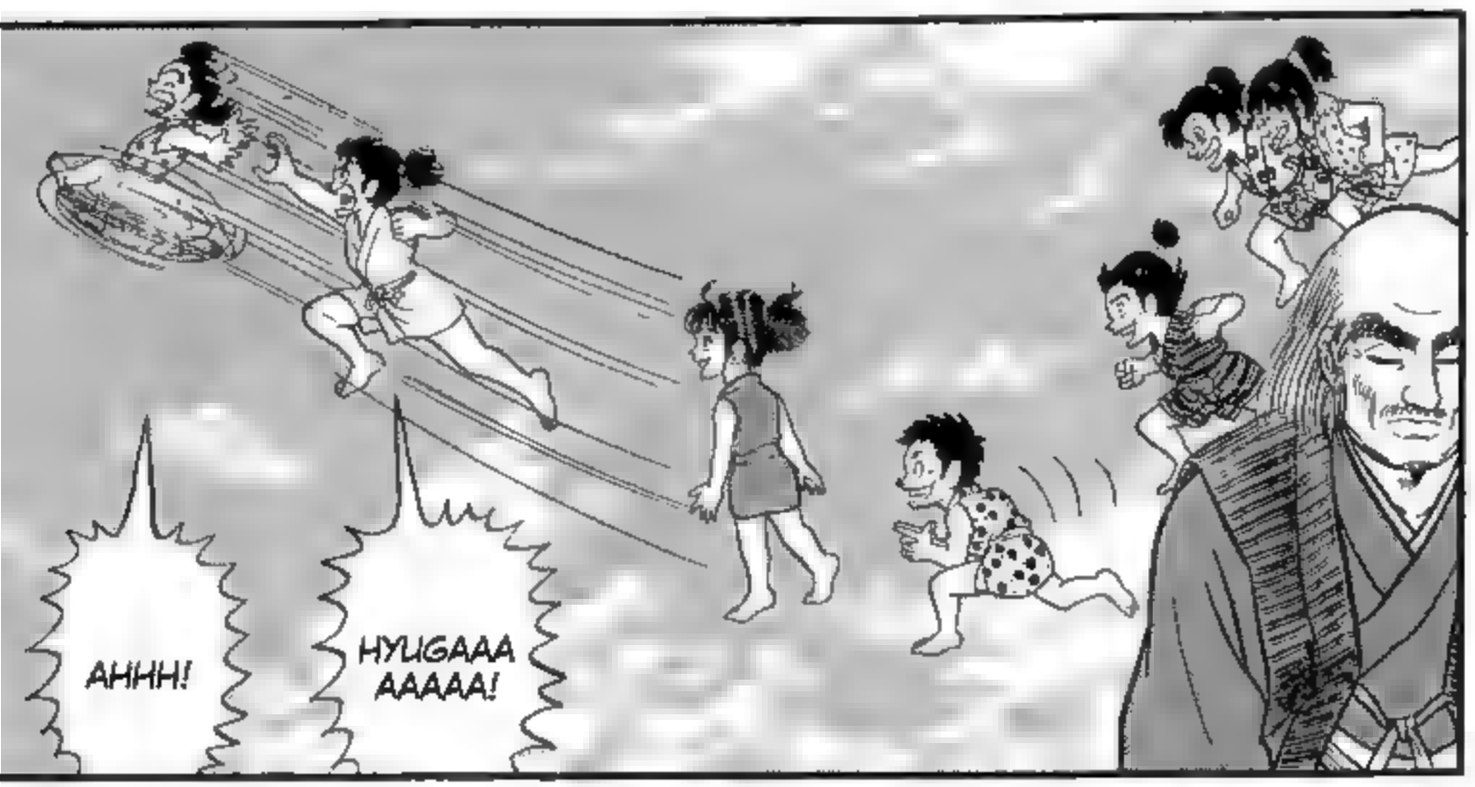
I WONDER IF THEY WON'T STIR UP TROUBLE FOR THOSE ALREADY LIVING HERE!
THOSE DON'T SEEM LIKE THE EYES OF PEOPLE WILLING TO LIVE QUIETLY!

YOU SHOULD KILL THEM AAAALLL!
KILL THEM, RIGHT?
IF THOSE WHO YOU THOUGHT TO PROTECT WOULD TRY TO START A WAR, WHAT WOULD YOU DO, AZUMI!?

I DON'T LIKE THAT! KILL THEM ALL!
DON'T BE FOOLISH!! JUST KILLING THE RINGLEADERS WHO'RE INSTIGATING THEM WOULD TRANQUILIZE THE OTHERS. THAT'S AZUMI'S MISSION. AND MORE THAN ANYTHING, THE SHOGUNATE DOESN'T HAVE TO KNOW ABOUT IT.

EH EH EHHH HHH!
WHAT DO YOU THINK A MISSION IS!?
LET'S GO KILL THEM TOGETHER, AZUMI!!!


BOH!
AZUMI... IF IT WERE ME...
FIRST, I'D..


AHHH!
HYUGAAA AAAAA!

YOU JERK!

YOU'RE OPEN!

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GET HIIIII IIIM!!
WAHAHA HAHAHA!

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.....
A... DREAM ...?
.....
!!

IT'S ME, AZUMI.
.....

GOT IT.
THERE'S A PLACE I WANT TO TAKE YOU TO NOW, WHILE IT'S STILL DARK. COME OUT.

WHY ARE WE CLIMBING A MOUNTAIN?
EVEN THOUGH YOU SAID WE WERE GOING TO THE COUNTRY BORDERS,
THIS WAY THAN THE NORMAL ROAD.
WE CAN GET THERE MUCH QUICKER

I WONDER IF YOU'LL BE ABLE TO KEEP UP WITH ME!
BY THE WAY...
THAT'S SO LIKE YOU, TOBIZARU!
YOU'VE EVEN FOUND A SHORTCUT ALREADY!

NO MATTER HOW HARSH THE ROAD WILL BE, I WON'T LAG BEHIND YOU!!
I WANNA TRY RACING YOU THROUGH THE VALLEY!
WHERE DO YOU THINK I GREW UP!?
HYAH!
HOH!
HAH!
AND I'VE ALREADY GOTTEN USED TO THE SNOW!
HAH HAH HAH HAH!
THIS WAY!?
WHERE TO!?

THE SNOW IS VERY DEEP HERE.
OH, THOSE! UHMMM...OH, WERE THEY CALLED AGAIN!?
OH, RIGHT! SNOW-SHOES!
WE SHOULD'VE BROUGHT THE ONES AT THE MANSION, TOBIZARU!
WHAT ARE YOU HIDING IN SUCH A PLACE?
SOME-THING BETTER THAN SNOW-SHOES.
HM !?

WHAT IS... THIS?

I'M CONC-ERNED.
AZUMI...YOU'RE STILL TOO INEXPERIENCED WITH THE SNOW...
TAKING SNOW TOO LIGHTLY COULD COST YOU YOUR LIFE...IT'S NO JOKING MATTER!

WHAT... IS A... SLED...?
I BUILT THESE THINKING WHAT WOULD'VE HAPPENED IF YOU PUT SLEDS ON THE FEET.

WAH HAHAH HAHAH!

EVEN FOR YOU, IT'S TOUGH TO USE, RIGHT!?
HOW IS IT!?

I'LL WAIT UP AHEAD! FOLLOW ME WHERE I SLID!
.....
Ooo
.....
.....
WHAT A FALL!
HEHE, WOW!

UUUUUH.
..

HEHEHEHE! SHOULD I WAIT FOR HE AROUND HERE...?
SHE WAS TOO FUNNY!

WELL, IT TOOK ME A WHILE TO BE ABLE TO SLIDE AROUND HOW I WANT...
HAH HAH HAH!
THAT WAS THE FIRST TIME I SAW AZUMI, PROUD, KEEN, SKILLFULL AT WHATEVER SHE DOES, IN SUCH A STATE!!
HOW MUCH TIME WILL IT TAKE FOR HER TO GET HERE...?
WHA...

TOBIZARU! THIS IS SO MUCH FUN!
S-SHE'S ALREADY...

SHE'S UNBELI-EVABLE!

I'LL SHOW YOU THE REASONS NOW!
YES!
WHAT YOU WANTED TO SHOW ME WAS THIS ROAD...? WHY SUCH A ROAD WAS BUILT UP IN THE MOUNTAINS...?

SOMETHING ONLY A SHINOBI COULD ENTER FROM.
THE REST IS A VALLEY WITH STEEP CLIFFS.
YOU CAN ONLY ENTER AND EXIT THIS DOMAIN FROM TWO PLACES: THE ONE YOU CAME IN FROM THE OPPOSITE SIDE AND THIS ONE HERE.
SO, IF AN ARMY INVADED THIS DOMAIN, IT COULD ONLY BE FROM THAT SIDE OR HERE.

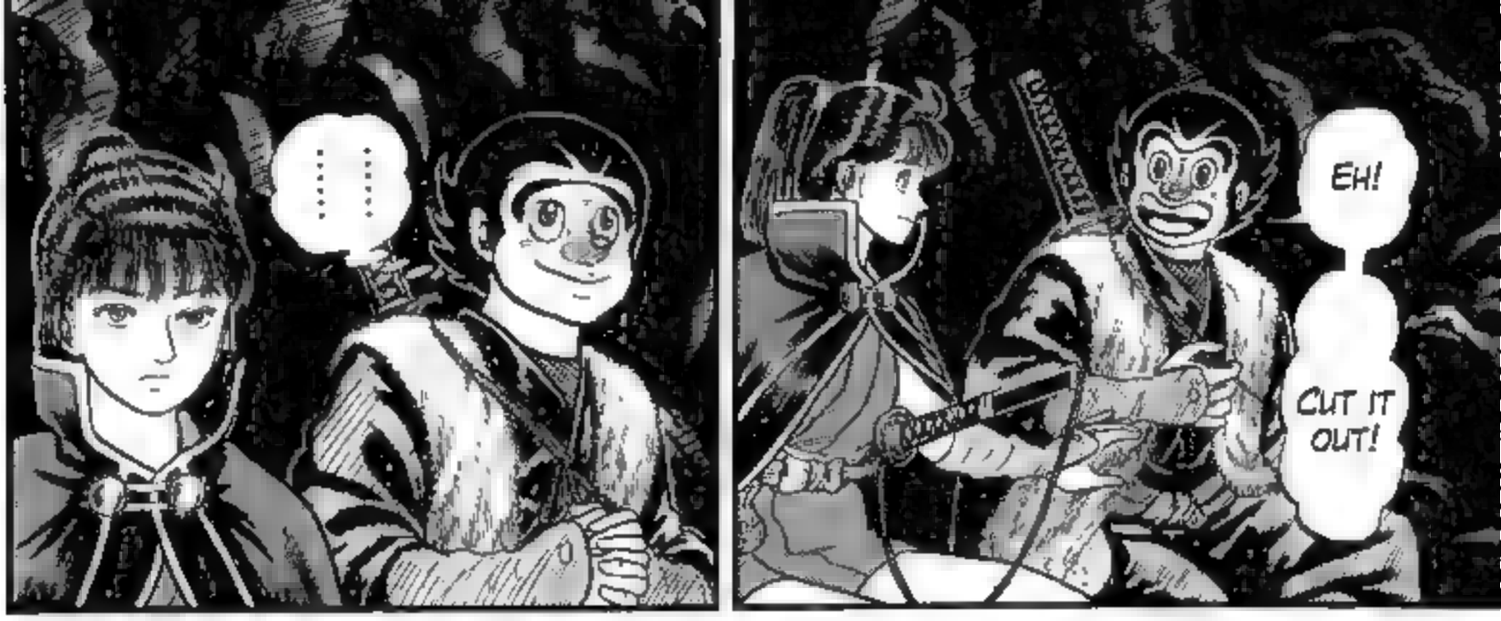
!!
SEE?
THESE THINGS...
ARE POSITIONED AIMING AT THE ENTANCE.
MOREOVER, THERE'RE OTHERS IN THE CLIFF ON THE OTHER SIDE TOO.
NOW MATTER HOW BIG THE ARMY MAY BE...
IT WOULD BE DESTROYED DUE TO THE ROAD HAVING NO PLACE TO TAKE REFUGE...
NOW.
COME HERE.
THERE'S A SECRET PASSAGE.
AND WHEN YOU ENTER...
19

THEY'RE CLEVERLY CONCEALED. THEY CAN'T BE NOTICED FROM DOWN THERE...
I'M GONNA INVESTI-GATE HEREON.
BUT I GUESS THEY'RE ON THE OTHER BORDER AS WELL...
ANYWAY...THEY DID WELL COMING THIS FAR WITHOUT THE CASTLE SAMURAI NOTICING ANY-THING...

IT'S A VERY WELL KEPT SECRET TO ENSURE NO LEAKS...
THOSE FOUR WHO'VE INFILTRATED IN THE RONIN GROUP PROBABLY HAV-EN'T NOTICED ANYTHING YET BECAUSE

THANK YOU, TOBI-ZARU!
YOU'RE REALLY SOME-THING!
THANK YOU FOR DISC-OVERING THIS!
AND SHOWING IT TO ME!

.....


.....
EH!
CUT IT OUT!

.....

.....
SO... WHAT DO WE DO?
THEY'VE PREPARED TO THIS EXTENT.
FOR US ALONE... IT MAY BE A BIT TOO MUCH.

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ガヤ
ガヤ
WHAT'S THE COMMOTION?
WEL-COME!
OHHH! IF IT ISN'T AZUMI-DONO!

THE LAW?
.....
THEY CAUGHT A SAMURAI FROM THE CASTLE WHO BROKE THE LAW!

IS THERE SUCH AN AGREEMENT?
WE CAN'T ALLOW THAT.
HE INFILTRATED AN AREA WHERE IT WAS AGREED THAT NO CASTLE SAMURAI COULD EVER ENTER... THEY SAY HE WAS SEARCHING FOR SOMETHING.

.....
OF COURSE!

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おお!!
NOT ONLY RONIN, BUT THE COMMONERS AS WELL...THEY'RE ARMED WITH BAMBOO SPEARS...

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おわー!

!!
TZUD-
ZORA-
DONO!

……

DID HE FAIL A RECON MISSION?
TZUD-ZORA-DONO...

KAGARI-DONO HAS IMILTRATED THE RONIN...

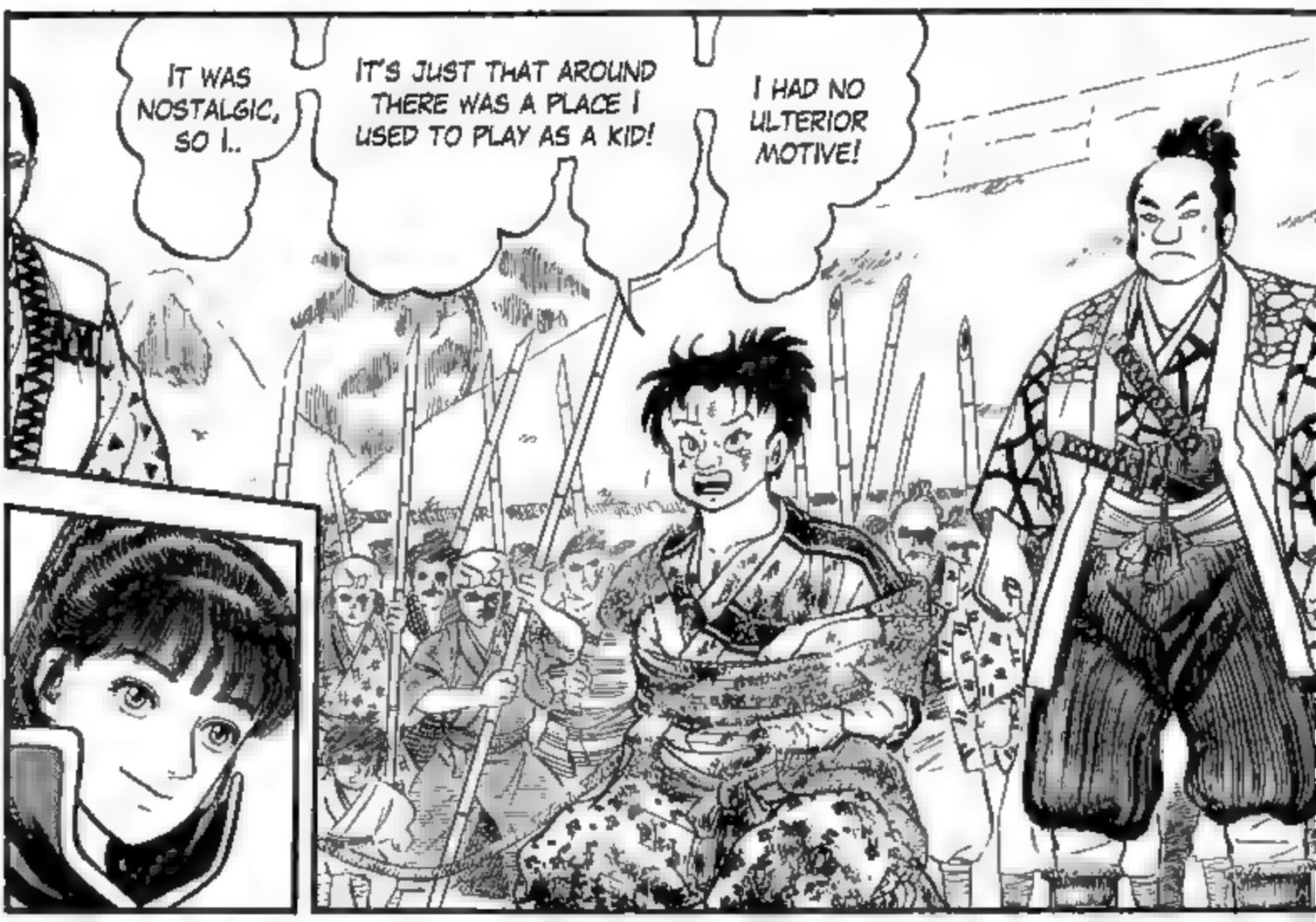
HM!?
WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN TO THIS SAMURAI?

.....
HAH HAH HAH.

OHHH! SO HE'S A SAMURAI WHO'S KNOWN TO YOU...?
YES.
TO TELL THE TRUTH, THIS SAMURAI IS...SOMEONE WHO WAS REALLY KIND TO ME AFTER I ARRIVED IN THIS COUNTRY.

.....
OOOH, OOOH...
SO PLEASE ...

UMM.. .SO...


IT WAS NOSTALGIC, SO I..
IT'S JUST THAT AROUND THERE WAS A PLACE I USED TO PLAY AS A KID!
I HAD NO ULTERIOR MOTIVE!

I DON'T THINK IT'S MUCH OF A CRIME...

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!!

EVERYONE! DO IT, TOO!
THIS WILL BE GOOD PRACTICE TO GIVE US THE COURAGE FOR "THE PROMISED DAY"!!

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CHAPTER 3: THE REUINION WITH SHUNJIRO

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STOOO
OOOOP
!!!!
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NOW THAT WE'RE THIS FAR...
WE SHOULD BE FINE WALKING TOGETHER!

SHIT!
TSUDZURA'S CORPSE...IS GOING TO BE ILL-TREATED BY THOSE BASTARDS, NO DOUBT.

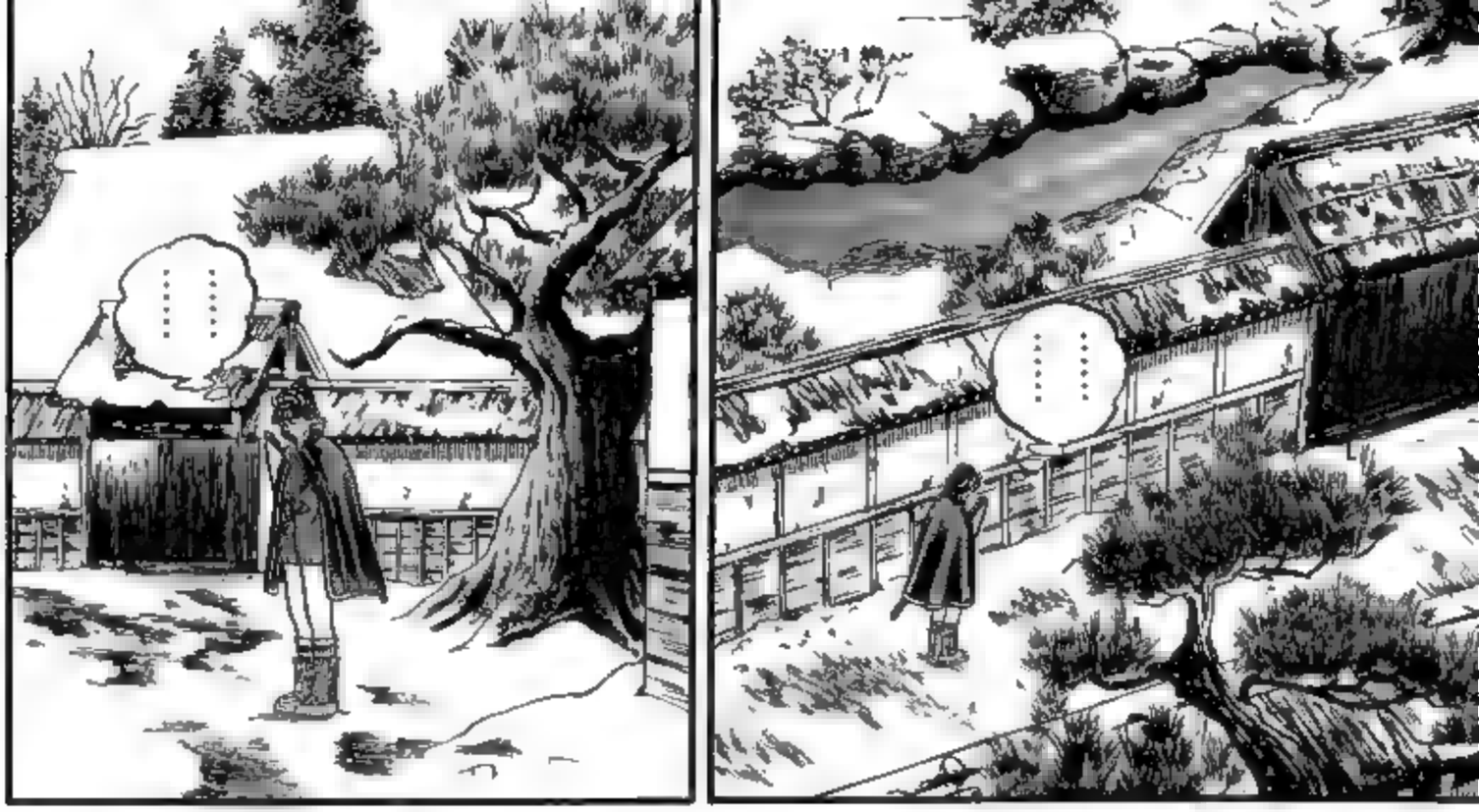
BUT JUST WHO ARE YOU REALLY, GIRL!?
EEH !?
YOU'RE A BIG-SHOT SAMURAI'S DAUGHTER, RIGHT?

WELL...
N-NO..

IF YOU REALLY HAVE THAT SOCIAL STATUS, YOU COULD'VE ORDERED THEM TO STOP IT, RIGHT!?

WITH SUCH A HIGH STATUS, YOU COULD'VE DONE IT! BUT YOU DIDN'T! YOU LET TSUDZURA DIE!

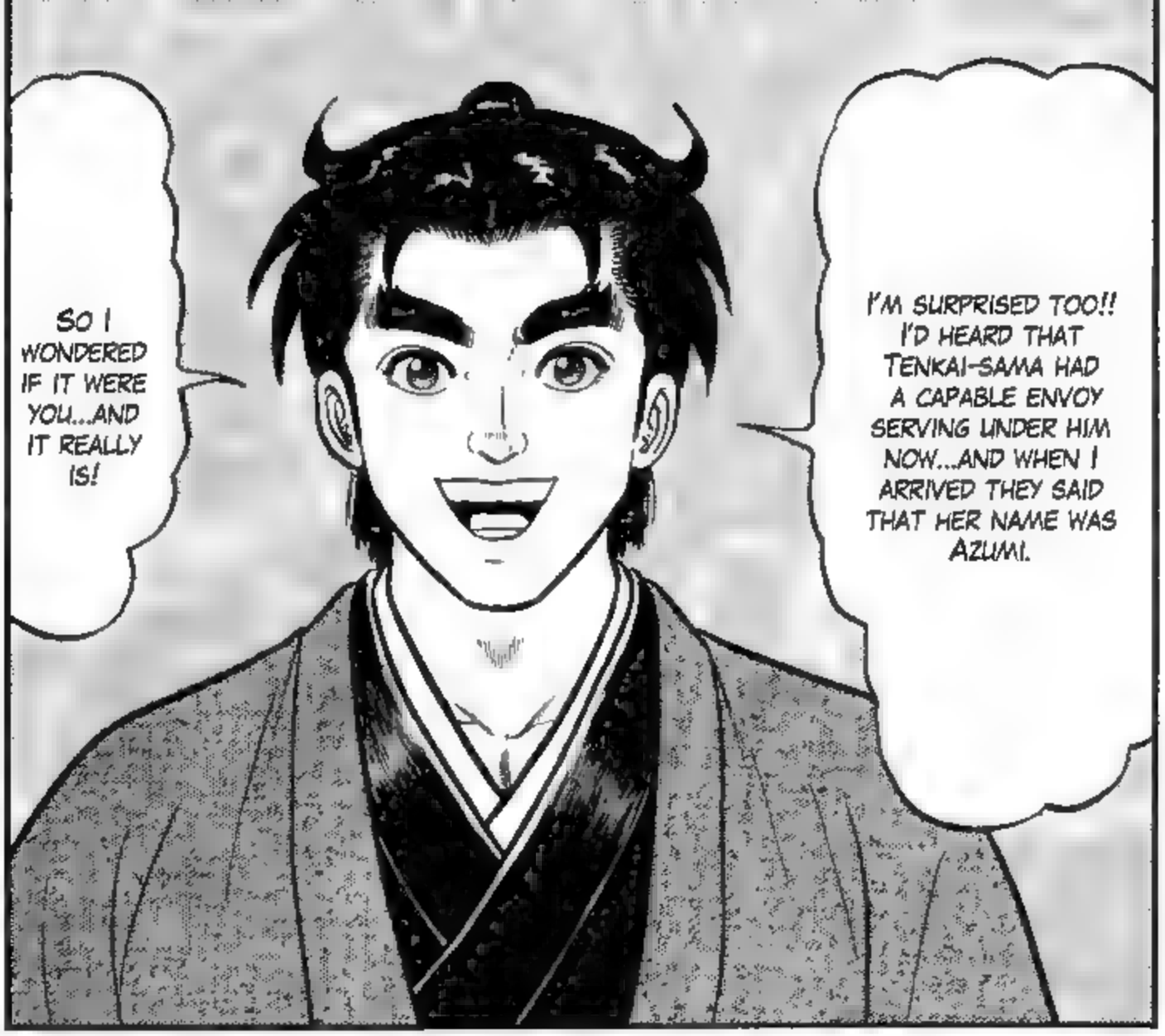
HOW COULD I HAVE KNOWN THOSE WOMEN WITH BAMBOO SPEARS WOULD'VE STABBED HIM FOR REAL...?
N-NO WAY...
DON'T YOU DARE SHOW YOUR FACE!
HOWEVER, YOU ARE NOT WELCOME !!!
WE WON'T HAVE HIS CORPSE...BUT I INTEND TO HOLD A MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR HIM AMONG US.
.....
.....
5



TZUD-
ZORA-
DONO...
I'M SO
SORRY...
I FEEL...
AWFULLY
COLD...

EVEN WITH THE
SUN SHINING
ON ME...I FEEL
SO COLD...

AHH...


I'M SURPRISED TOO!! I'D HEARD THAT TENKAI-SAMA HAD A CAPABLE ENVOY SERVING UNDER HIM NOW...AND WHEN I ARRIVED THEY SAID THAT HER NAME WAS AZUMI.
SO I WONDERED IF IT WERE YOU...AND IT REALLY IS!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN THIS LAND, SHUNJIRO-DONO !?
I'D LIKE FOR YOU TO ACCOMPANY ME! PLEASE MOUNT UP!
LET'S TALK ALL WE WISH ON THE ROAD!

WHO WAS HUNTING YOU DOWN...AND YOU WON, RIGHT?
MEANS YOU FOUGHT SAKON OF THE YAGYU
THE FACT THAT YOU'RE SAFE NOW...

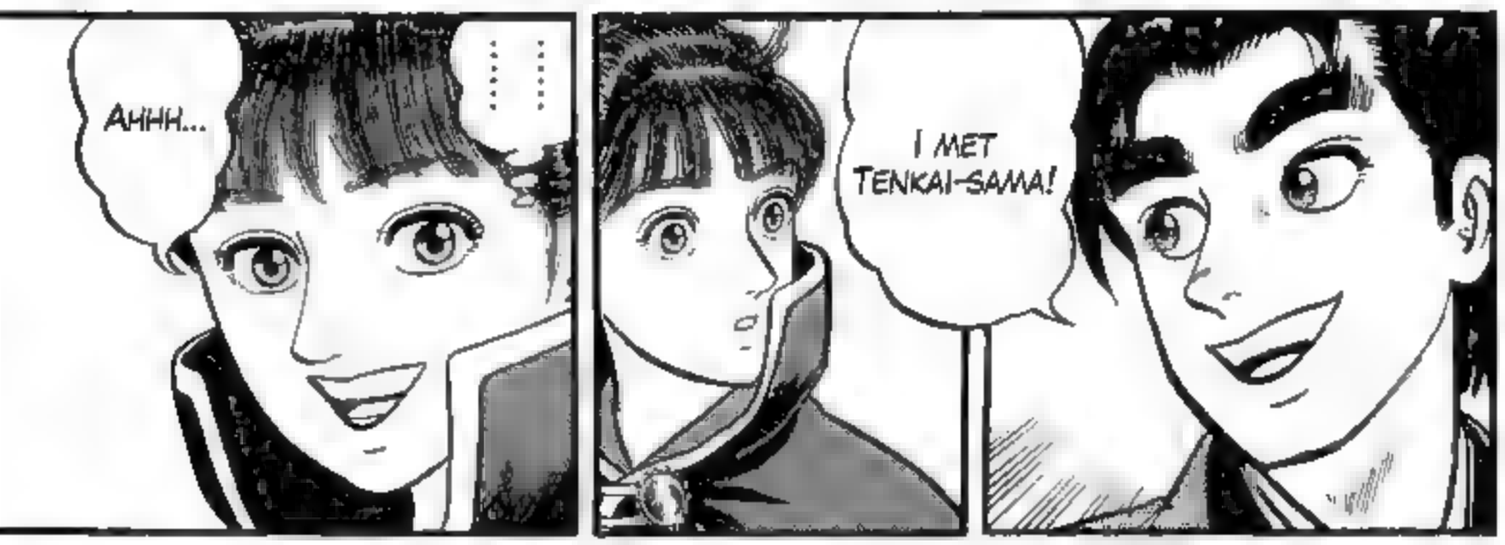
AMAZING! AZUMI-SAN, YOU'RE TRULY A MASTER WITH THE SWORD!

ACTUALLY... I....AFTER... THAT...

I ACTED RECK-LESSLY ...
AND THINKING I'D NEVER LET HIM KILL YOU...
I MET SAKON ...
I FACED SAKON AND HE CUT ME DOWN...
HAH HAH HAH!
WHAAA AAAT!?

WHILE I WAS RECOVERING...
TENZAN-DONO AND THE OTHERS FOUND ME ...
THANKFULLY, IT WASN'T A FATAL WOUND.

I MET SOME WONDER-FUL PEO-PLE
WHO INVITED ME
TO TAG ALONG WITH THEM.
AND THEN...


AHHH...
.....
I MET TENKAI-SAMA!

THAT'S A GOLD MINE!

.....
I LEAVE THE HORSES IN YOUR CARE!
WELCOME BACK!
YES!

WELCOME BACK!
SHUNJIRO-DONO, WHAT SORT OF POSITION DO YOU HAVE HERE?

AH ...
YOU'RE IN SUCH A GREAT POSITION!

IN OTHER WORDS I'M THE MINE ADMISTRATOR FOR THE SHOGUNATE... SOMETHING LIKE THAT...
I WAS TRUSTED WITH EVERY MATTER INVOLVING THIS MINE!

ESSENTIALLY, THE CHIEF VASSAL OF THIS PLACE SHOULD SETTLE ACCOUNTS, BUT
IF HE DID THAT, A RATHER... SUSPICIOUS FLOW OF GOLD WOULD APPEAR.
SO, TENKAI-SAMA
AS A POINT TO KEEP THE EXISTENCE OF THIS FIEF'S GOLD MINE SECRET FROM THE SHOGUNATE,
TOOK A RISK IN APPOINTING A COMPLETE STRANGER LIKE ME!

AT FIRST...THEY ENVIED ME...A GREEN-HORN OUTSIDER...A LOT.
IT WASN'T EASY.

EHHH... BUT IT'S STILL SO AMAZING!
IT MEANS TENKAI-DONO IMMEDIATELY SAW INTO YOUR HEART AND FOUND THAT YOU'RE AN AMAZING PERSON, SHUNJIRO-DONO!

TENZAN-DONO AND I...SHOWED THEM NEW REASONABLE WAYS OF MINING, TRANSPORTING AND SO ON,
AND NOW WE'VE GAINED EVERYONE'S TRUST!

AH...
THE TRUTH IS... TENZAN-DONO...

YOU'RE HERE WITH KARASUMA TENZAN-DONO, RIGHT!?
I WANNA MEET HIM!

I SEE...HE OVERWORKED HIMSELF...

STRAINED HIMSELF A BIT TOO MUCH AND COLLAPSED.
HE'S NOW IN A SANITORIUM A BIT OF A DISTANCE FROM HERE.

AH...

THERE ARE EVEN MEN FROM BACK THEN!

LONG TIME NO SEE, EVERYONE!

!?

!?

WE TRAVELED TOGE-THER!
I'M AZUMI!

MIST-AKING THEM?
EH?

YOU'RE MISTAKING THEM FOR OTHER FOLKS, AZUMI.

THEY MAY RESEMBLE THEM A BIT, BUT THEY AREN'T THEM.

WHAT'S WRONG, AZUMI?

I'VE HAD A CHILL...
AND ALSO...
I'VE JUST BEEN AWFULLY TIRED TODAY!

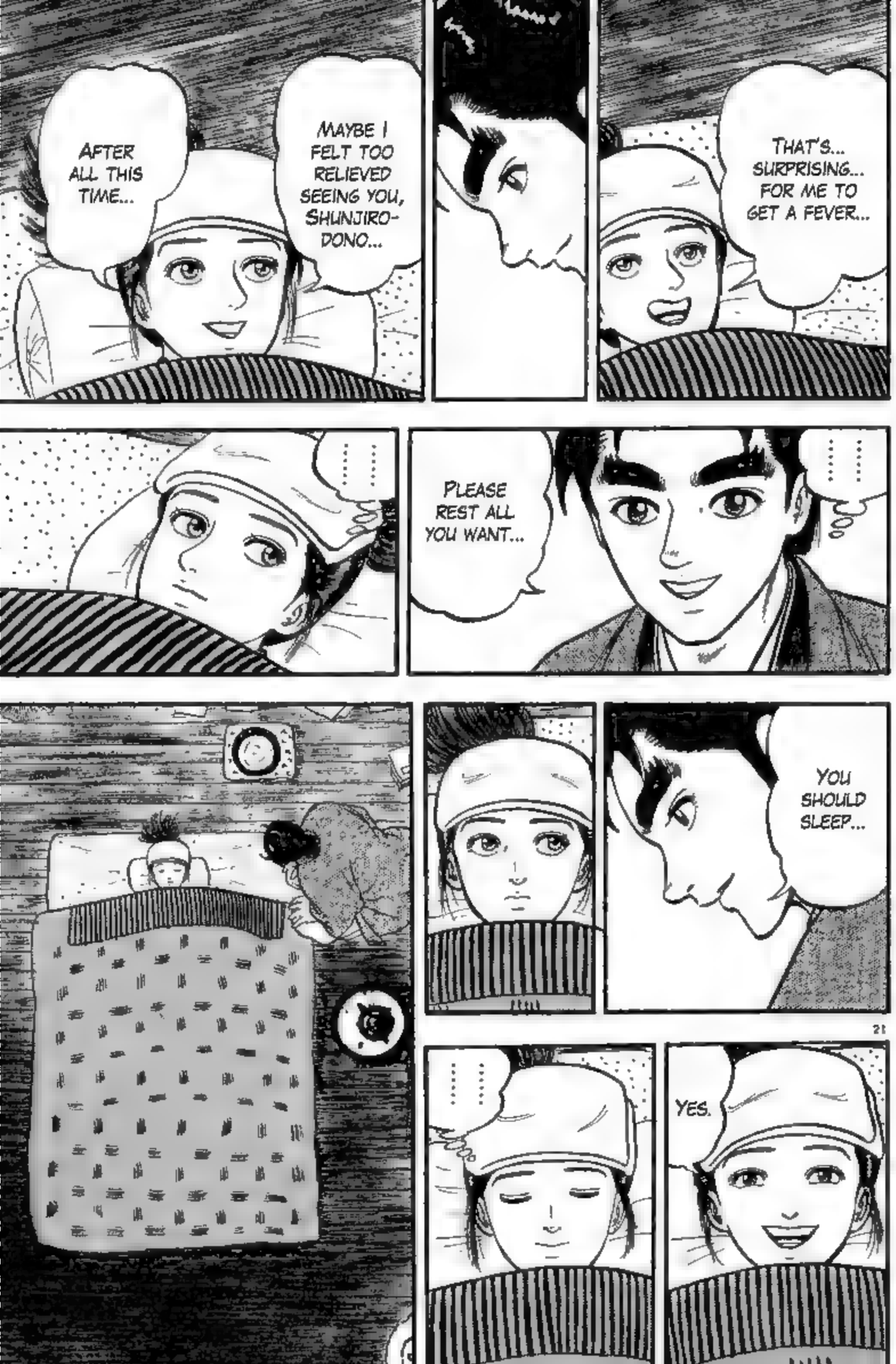
AZUMI-SAN! YOU HAVE A BAD FEVER!

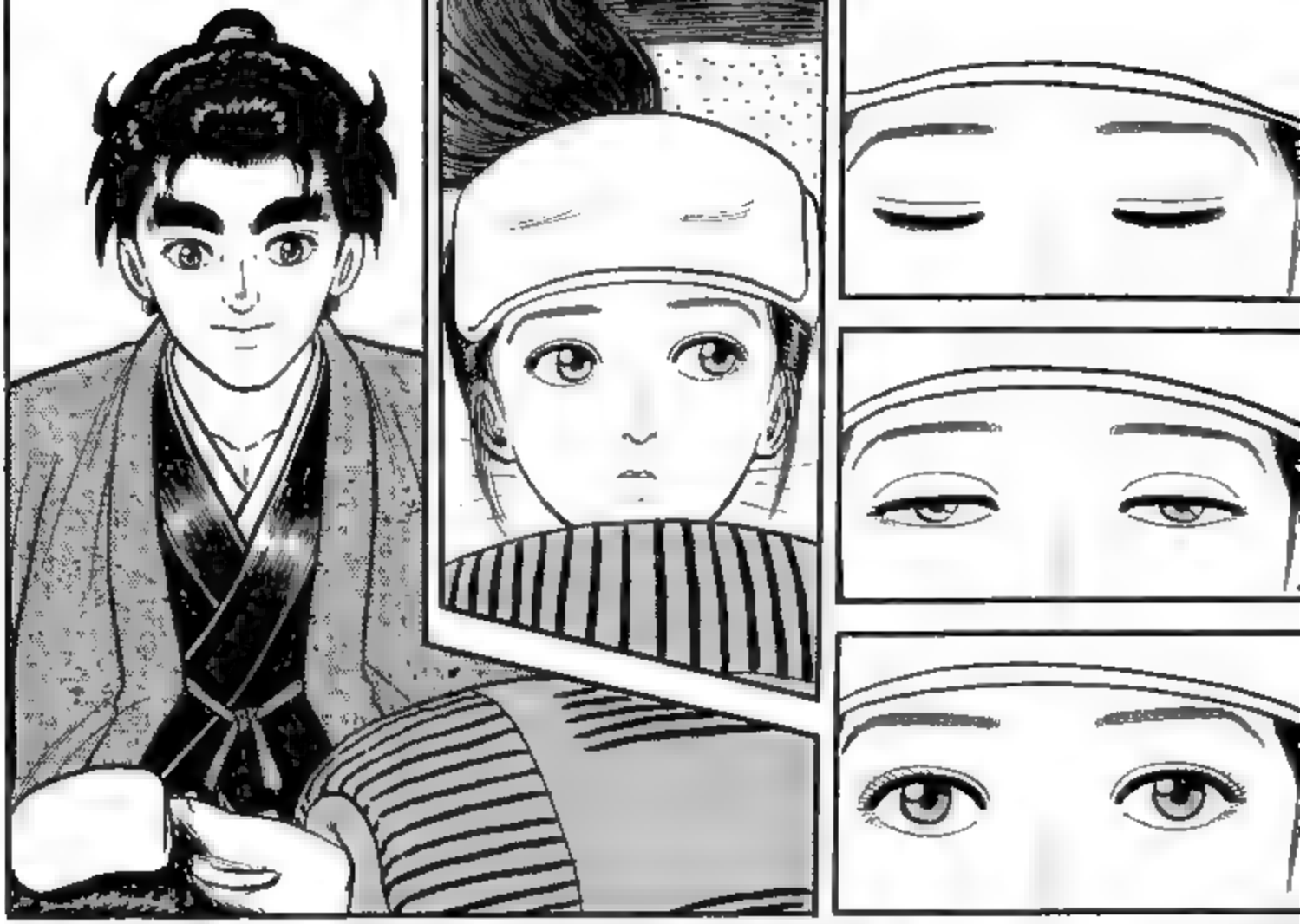
WELCOME BA-
AH!
SHE'S ILL! QUICKLY LAY A FUTON DOWN FOR HER IN THE BACK!
Y-YES!
.....

FOR ME TO HAVE A FEVER...
ALL THE STRESS AND FATIGUE HAVE PILED UP...

THIS IS MY ROOM...DON'T WORRY AND GET PLENTY OF REST.

IF IT'S YOU, AZUMI-SAN, I DO IT HAPPILY!
DAMN...I KEEP ENDING UP WITH YOU NURSING ME...

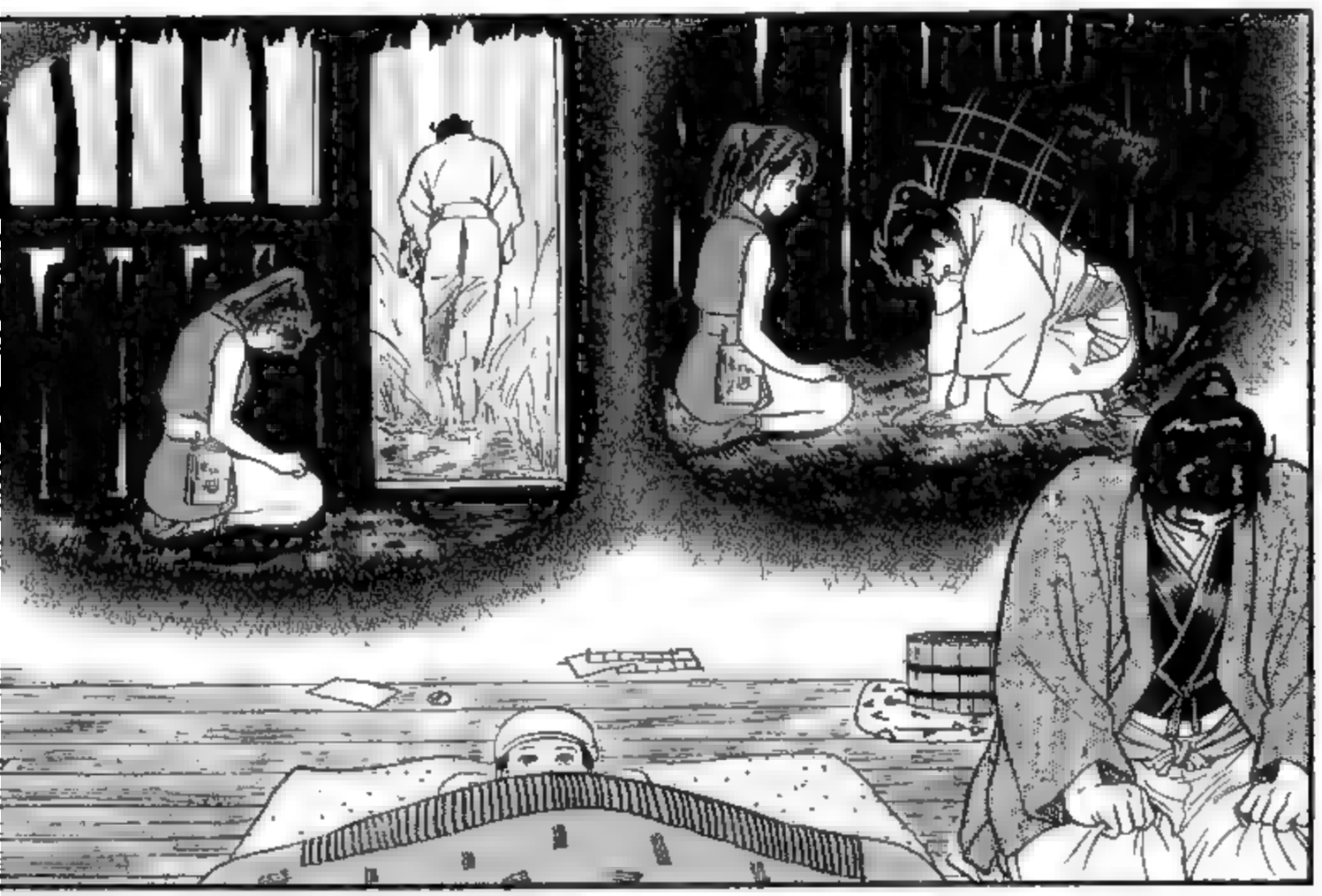

AFTER ALL THIS TIME...
MAYBE I FELT TOO RELIEVED SEEING YOU, SHUNJIRO-DONO...
THAT'S... SURPRISING... FOR ME TO GET A FEVER...
.....
PLEASE REST ALL YOU WANT...
.....
YOU SHOULD SLEEP...
.....
YES.

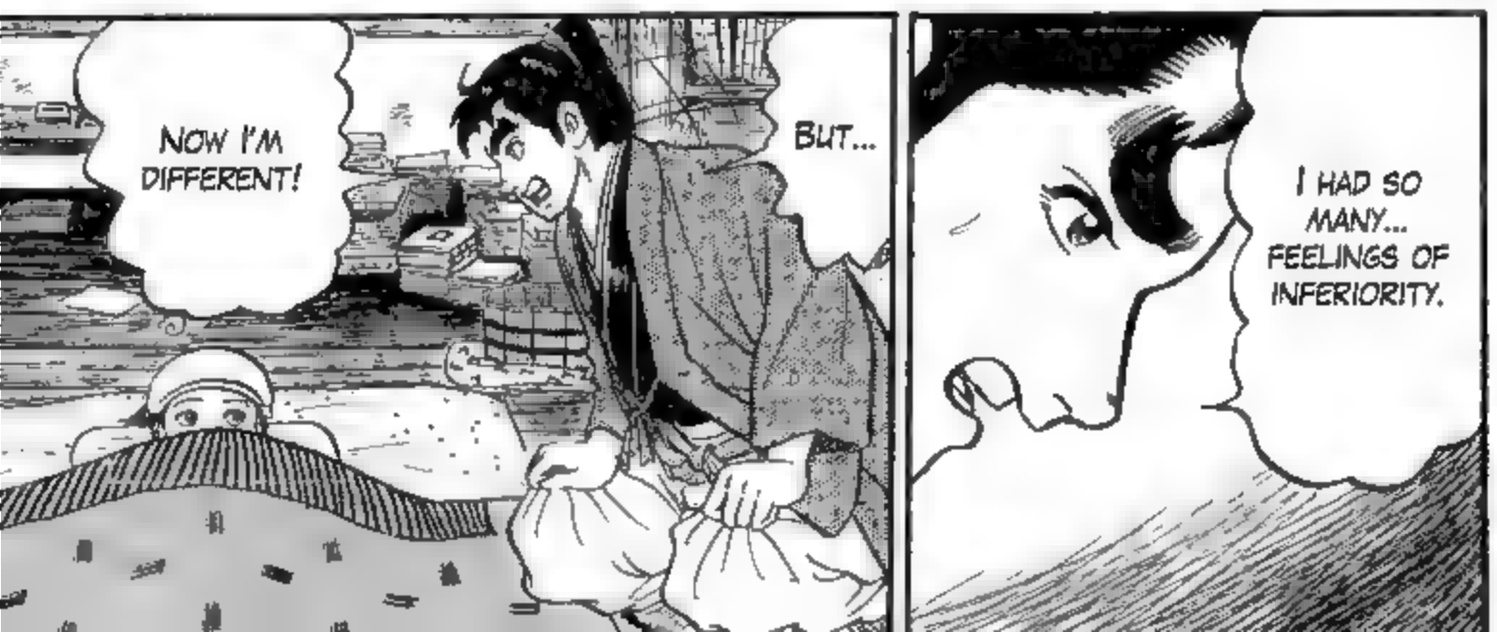


IT'S EMBARR-ASSING!
ARE YOU GONNA WATCH ME THE WHOLE TIME?

AH!
I'M SO SORRY!

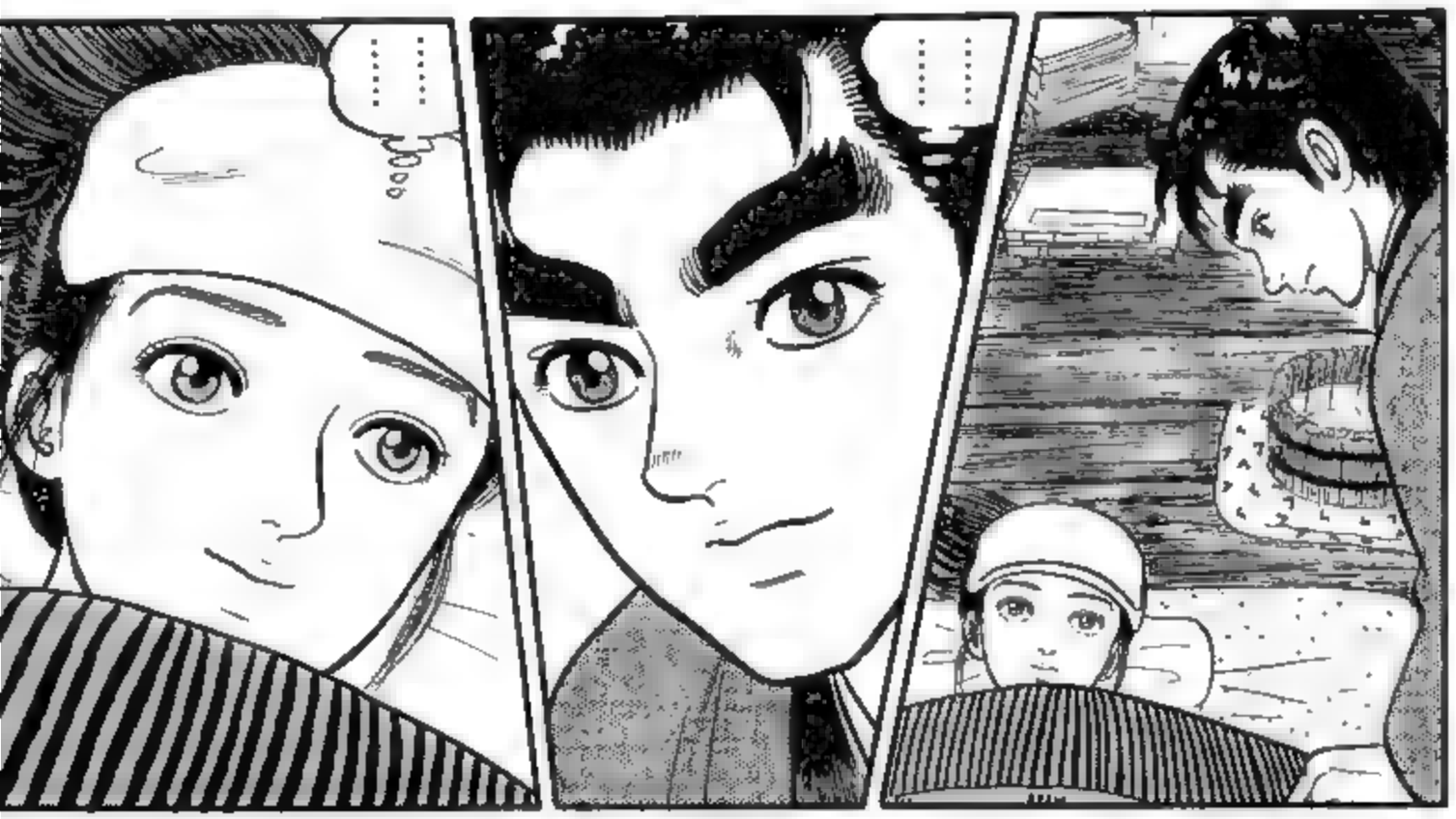
I TRULY REGRET HOW I ACTED...
BACK THEN...
IT WAS INEXCUSABLE!




I HAD SO MANY... FEELINGS OF INFERIORITY.
BUT...
NOW I'M DIFFERENT!

I'M SO GLAD I COULD MEET YOU AGAIN, AZUMI-DONO!
IN THIS COUNTRY.. THIS TIME!
I KNOW I CAN PROTECT YOU!
.....
AZUMI! YOU'RE GOING TO DIE IN THESE LANDS!
BRUTALLY!

.....
.....
DON'T YOU WORRY ABOUT A THING!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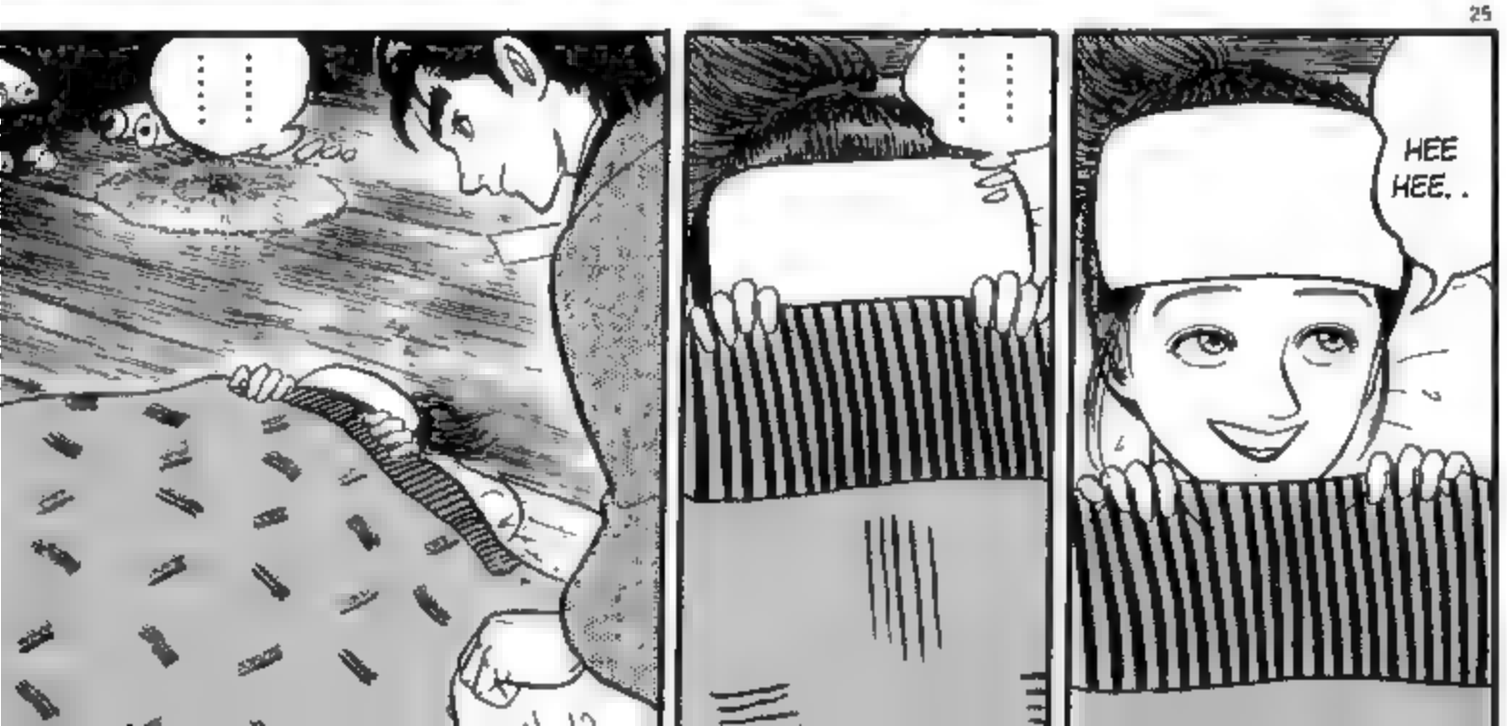
.....
.....
HEE HEE. .

JUST NOW...
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ガラ

HUH?
JUST NOW, Y'KNOW?
ガラ

ガラ
ガラ

AZUMI-SAN WAS THERE, RIGHT...?
ガラガラガラ

HUH?
HEY...?

ガラ
ガラ
ガラ

AZUMI-SAN WAS THERE.
YES.
SAN...
AZU... MI...
WHAT ARE YOU DILLYDALLYING FOR THERE!?
ビクッ
ビクッ
27
WOOO OOORK !!!!
GET A MOVE ON!
ビシッ
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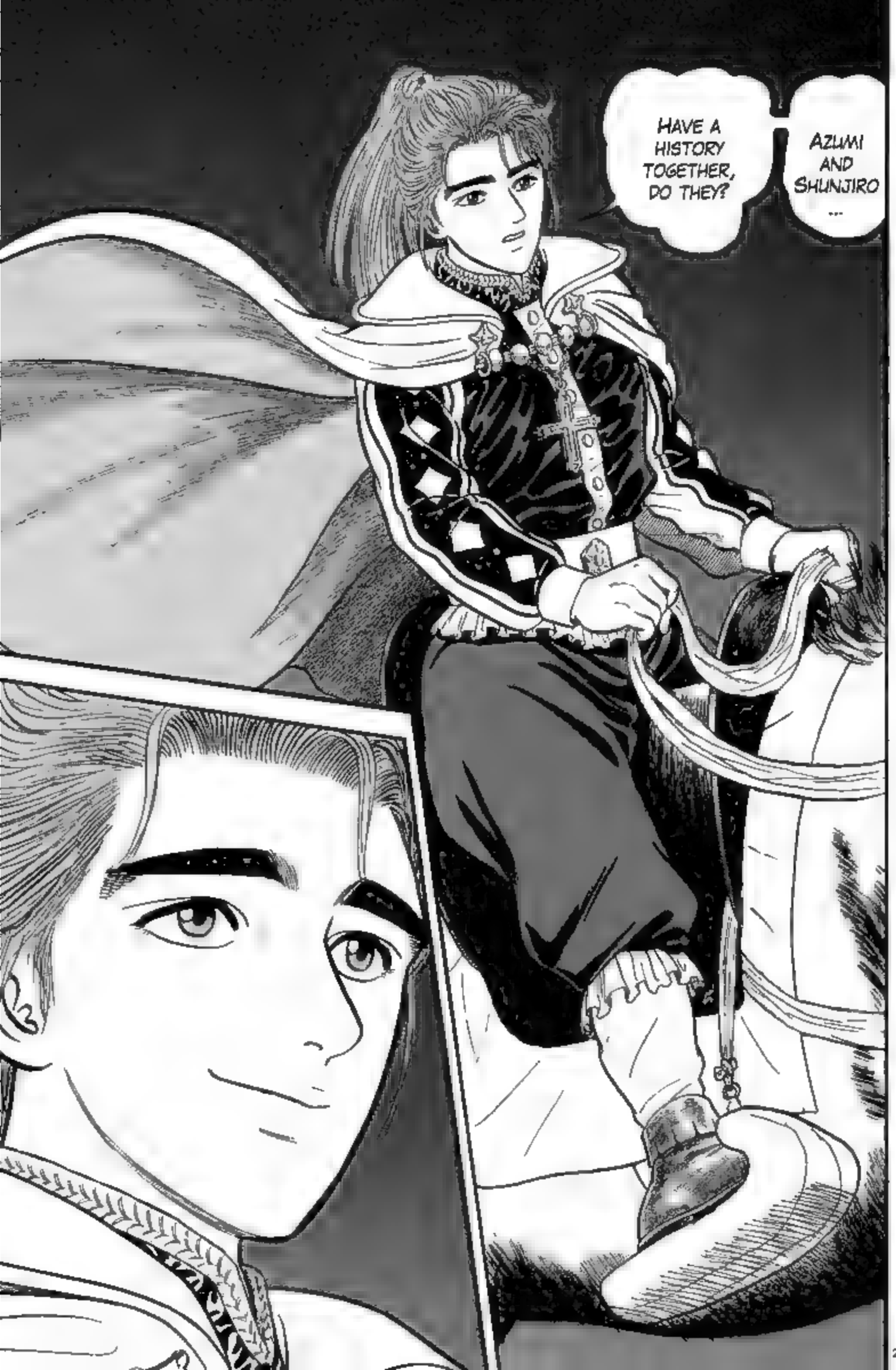
ビシッ
AHHH! FORGIVE US!!!

IS THAT SO...?
AH...

I SEE. AH...
HM?


AZUMI AND SHUNJIRO ...
HAVE A HISTORY TOGETHER, DO THEY?

YES ...
I DON'T NEED YOU TONIGHT.
I'LL WASH YOUR BACK...
.....

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32

CHAPTER 4: SON OF GOD

2
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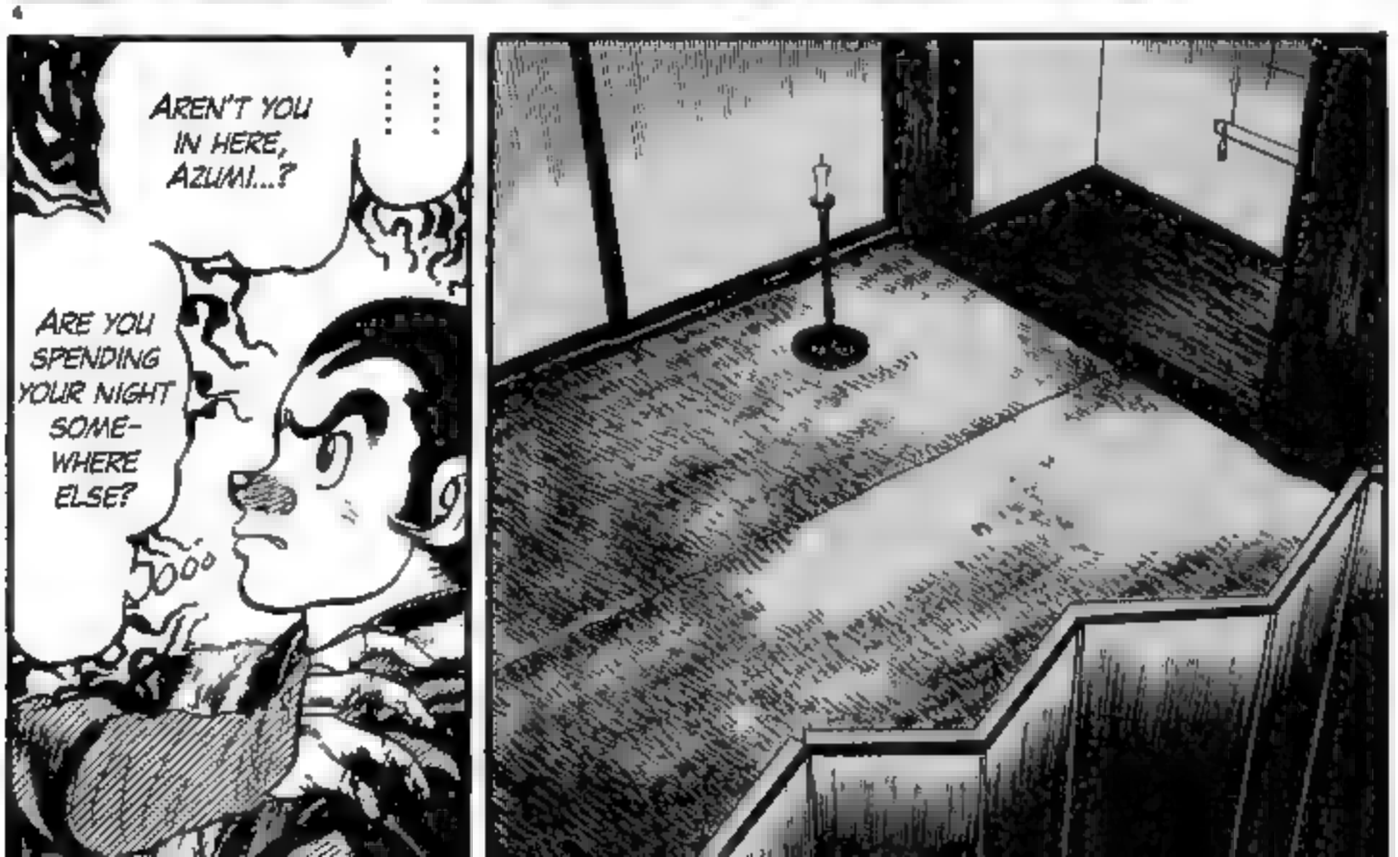
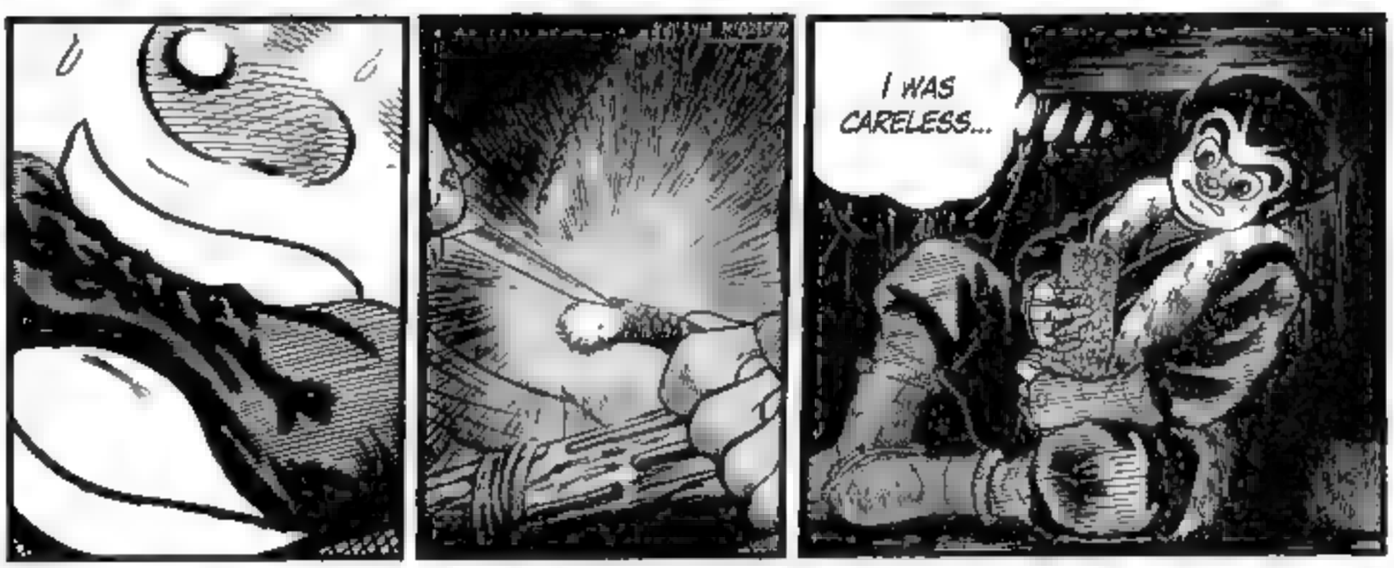
MY LORD!
GET HIM!
IIIH!!
INTRUDER!
OH!

O-
OUCH
...


AREN'T YOU IN HERE, AZUMI...?
.....
ARE YOU SPENDING YOUR NIGHT SOME-WHERE ELSE?


I WAS CARELESS...

UGGG GGH!

ARE YOU ALREADY FEELING BETTER!?
YES, I AM. THANK YOU SO MUCH.

CAN YOU LEND ME A HORSE?
WHAT IS IT !?
I'LL COME AGAIN! MORE IMPORTANTLY, YOU CAN DO ME A FAVOR...
YOU'LL TAKE IT SLOW AND EASY, RIGHT?

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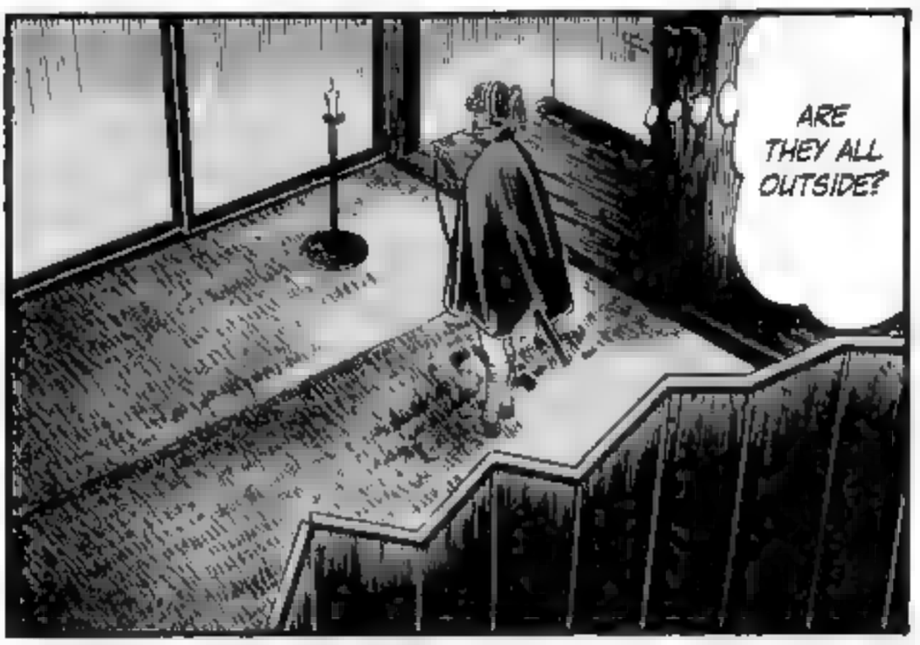
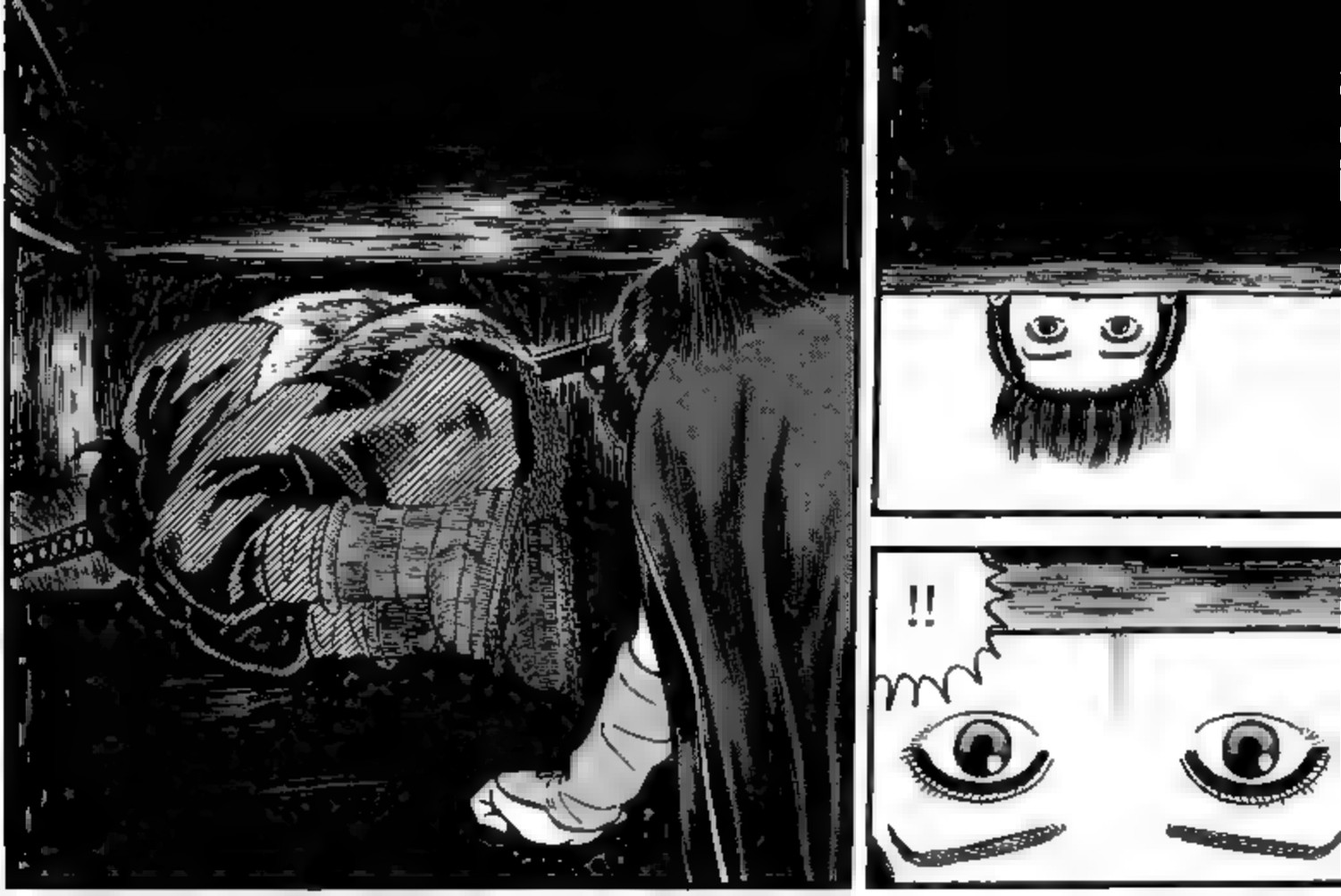
ドカカカ

IN THIS LAND...
HE SHOULD KNOW VERY WELL WHERE THOSE CANNONS ARE BEING MADE
IF SHUN-JIRO-DONO HAS THE POSI-TION OF GOLD MINE ADMINISTRA-TOR FOR THE SHOGUN-ATE,


ARE THEY ALL OUTSIDE?


!!

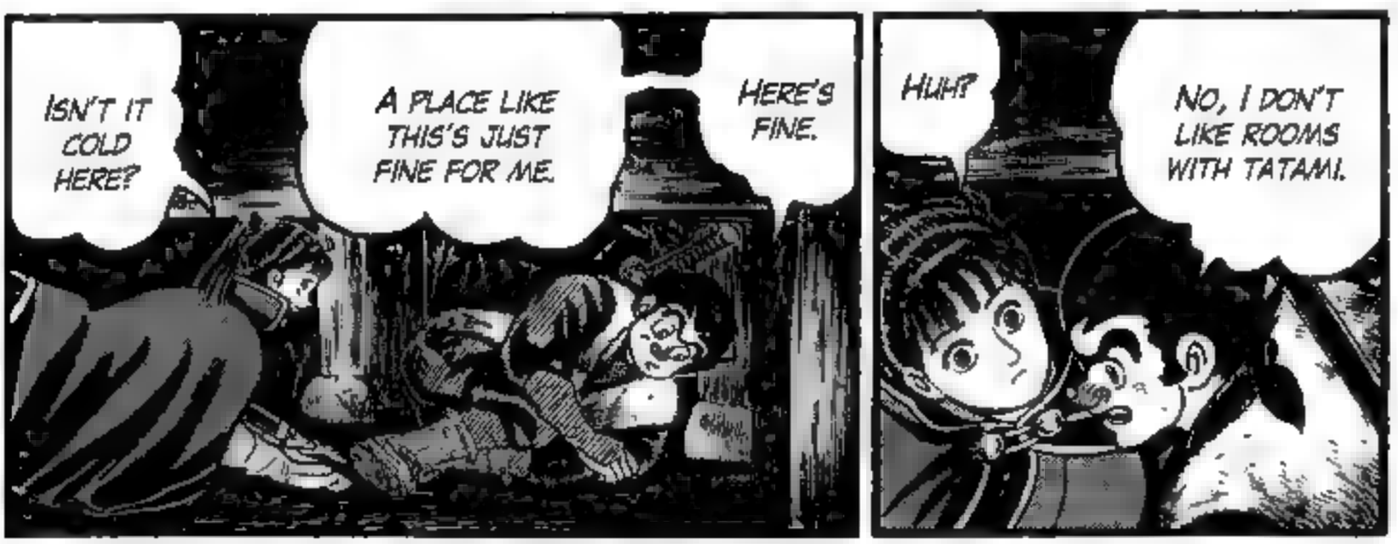
OHH...
TOBI-ZARU!!

TOBIZARU, WHAT HAPPENED!?

I WAS CARELESS AND GOT SHOT...
WHAT!!! WHERE!?

OUCH!

COME ON...
COME, LIE IN MY FUTON UPSTAIRS...
IT'S FINE. I'VE APPLIED TREATMENT...


ISN'T IT COLD HERE?
A PLACE LIKE THIS'S JUST FINE FOR ME.
HERE'S FINE.
HUH?
NO, I DON'T LIKE ROOMS WITH TATAMI.

I'M NOT BEING A STRANGER. IF SHINOBI GOT USED TO SLEEP IN FUTON, IT WOULD BE THEIR END!!
WHY ARE YOU ACTING THE STRANGER? COME SLEEP ON THE FUTON IN MY ROOM!
BRING ME A STRAW MAT OR A STRAW SHEAF AND I'LL SLEEP WITH THAT.

WHAT IS IT?
HEY, AZUMI...
OH!
SO... A STRAW MAT OR SHEAF, PLEASE!

GOT IT! I'LL BRING YOU A STRAW MAT... TOBIZARU, WHATEVER YOU DO, REMAIN HIDDEN HERE!
EHH...?
A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE COMING THIS WAY. THERE'S A HORSE TOO.

.....
BUT IF THEY'RE RONIN...
IT SEEMS THEY'RE HEADING HERE... THE ONES WHO KNOW I LIVE HERE ARE THE CASTLE SAMURAI...

OH!
AH!

ARE YOU CASTLE SAMURAI? OR PERHAPS...
I DO NOT RECALL HAVING MET YOU.
AZUMI-HIME! YOU WERE REALLY HERE!
WE HAVE BECOME ONE AND THE SAME!
FROM TODAY, THERE ARE NO MORE CASTLE SAMURAI OR ANY OTHER DISTINCTIONS.
WE HAVE COME TO PICK YOU UP. PLEASE, COME TO THE CASTLE FOR AN AUDIENCE.
HUH?
.....
TO THE CASTLE ...
.....

!!……
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ガヤ
THERE'S A HUGE AMOUNT OF COMMON PEOPLE AT THE CASTLE
PREPARED FOR BATTLE...

IT'S NOW SOMETHING NOT SOLELY MEANT FOR US NOBLE SAMURAI.
THE CASTLE HAS BEEN OPENED.
WHAT ARE ALL THE PEOPLE DOING HERE..?

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……

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……

GENSAI-DONO, I HAVE BROUGHT YOU AZUMI-HIME.
WE HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU!
WELL, WELL. AZUMI-HIME!

AND IT'S BEEN DECIDED THAT WE WILL BE LIVING HERE.
THIS CASTLE HAS BEEN OPENED THIS VERY DAY!
.....

ALL DONE WITH THE CONSENT OF THE COMMON PEOPLE.
WE HAD THE LORD OF THIS PLACE RETIRE, AND DISMISSED THE CASTLE SAMURAI WHO RAISED OBJECTIONS.

WE COULD ACCOMPLISH GREAT REFORMS QUICKLY AND WITHOUT ANY GREAT RESISTANCE
BECAUSE IT IS THE WISH OF THE MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN THIS NATION!
AND WHERE HAVE THE CASTLE SAMURAI GONE!?

MANY OF THE CASTLE SAMURAI NOW COUNT THEMSELVES AS OUR COMRADES.
THERE ARE STILL MANY PEOPLE WHO DON'T UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION YET.
WHO KNOWS? THERE'S SO MUCH DISORDER GOIN ON. NOW.

WHAT SIDE WILL YOU DECIDE ON, AZUMI-HIME?

.....
.....
.....

.....
TAKE YOUR TIME BEFORE YOU DECIDE!
HAHAHAHA. IT'S FINE!

YOU'RE IN NO POSITION TO SNEER DOWN AT US ANYMORE!
YOU STILL DON'T GET IT!
TSK!
I WON'T FORGIVE YOU!
WH-WHAT ARE YOU DOING!?
INSOL-ENT SWINE!

WAS THERE SOMEONE LEFT!?
WHAT'S WRONG!?

YES, THERE'S STILL A CHIEF VASSAL BEING STUBBORN WHO WON'T VACATE!

OHO! THIS GIRL IS A BEAUTY!
OOH!

AREN'T THESE METHODS THOSE OF LOWLY HOUSE THIEVES!?
YOOOOU! CALL YOURSELF A SAMURAI!?

DON'T YOU DARE TOUCH MY DAUGHTER, YOU LOWLY SERVANT!

IF YOU'RE SAMURAI AS WELL, WHY AREN'T YOU STOPPING THIS INSOLENCE!? KILL HIM!!

COMRADES NOW, DON'T YOU KNOW!
ARE THE SAME!
BEING SAMURAI AND BEING A COMMONER
THERE'S NO RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEOPLE THAT CONSISTS OF GIVING OR TAKING ORDERS NOW...
YOU SAY TO STOP HIM, BUT...

WHAT!
KH...
IS HAPPENING WITH THE CONSENSUS OF THE PEOPLE, TODAY!
IN OTHER WORDS, WHAT'S GOING ON...

REALLY!? IZZAT TRUE!?
HAS VANISHED AS OF TODAY!
THAT'S RIGHT!! EVEN THE FACT THAT WE FARMERS CAN'T GET NEAR THE DAUGHTER OF A SAMURAI
AH WANNA TOUCH A BYOOOOTIFUL SAM'RAI DAUGHTAH!
OOPS!
DAMN YOU! STOP THIS!
UHOOOO!
Y-YOU INSOLENT SCOUNDREL! DON'T COME NEAR ME!
.....
20

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GHH HHHH!
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OOOOH! IT'S SHZIUNE-SAMA!
SHIZUNE-SAMA!
SHIZUNE-SAMA!
SHIZUNE-SAMA!
23 22
I UNDERSTAND YOUR FEELINGS VERY WELL..
YOU'VE BEEN OVERCOME BY YOUR HIGH SPIRITS.
AS A NAUTR-AL REA-ACTION,
BECAUSE YOU'VE BEEN OPPRESSED FOR SO LONG,

BUT LET US KEEP DECORUM IN THE FRONT OF OUR MINDS!

FORGIVE OUR SHAME!
YES!!! WE'RE SO SORRY!

WERE YOU HURT?

I'LL TAKE OFF THAT FILTHY HAAAAAND!

おお!!
AAAA AAA AHH!
OOOO OOOO OOOH!
DO NOT BE ANGRY!
CALM YOUR-SELVES!
AND...
GRNT HIM YOUR FORGIVENESS!
あああ!!
うおー!

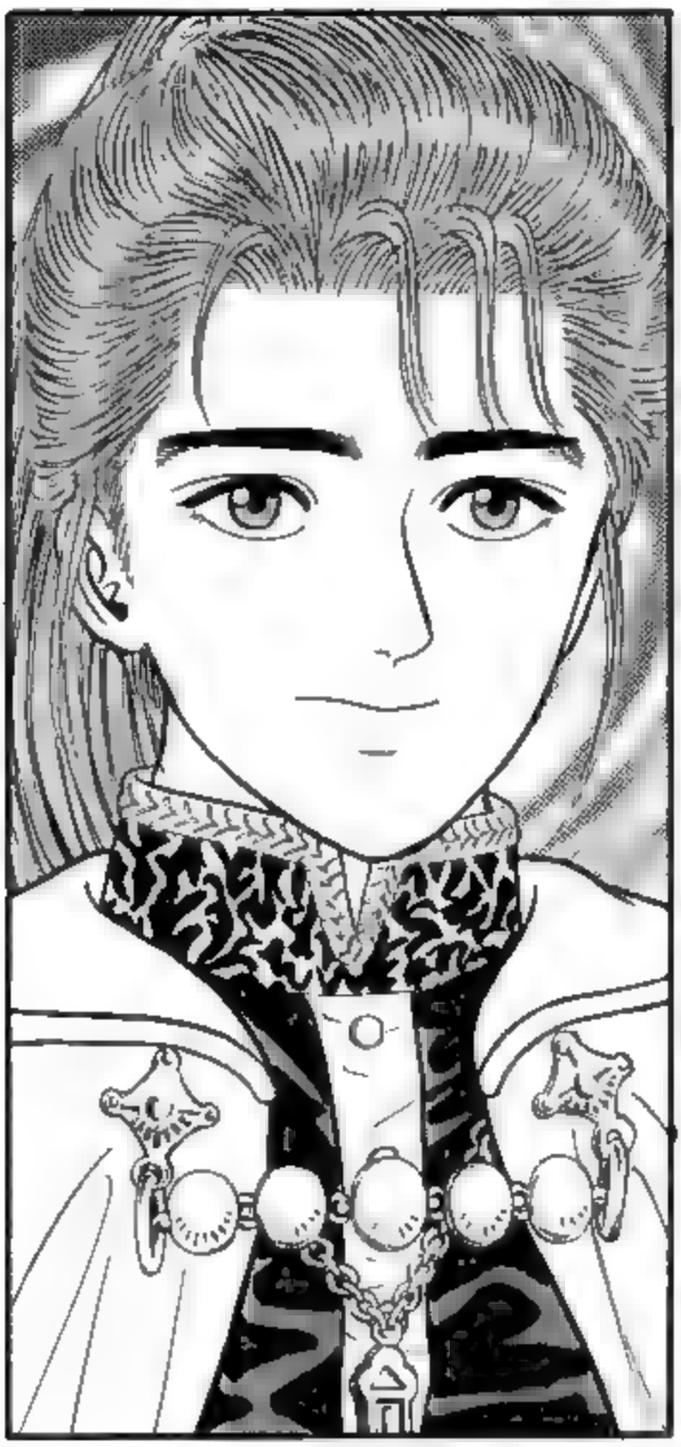
A WOUND LIKE THIS UPON MY FLESH WILL VANISH OVERNIGHT, LEAVING NOT EVEN THE FAINTEST SCAR!
THERE'S NO REASON TO FRET!
YOU SHOULD HAVE ALL SEEN BEFORE...

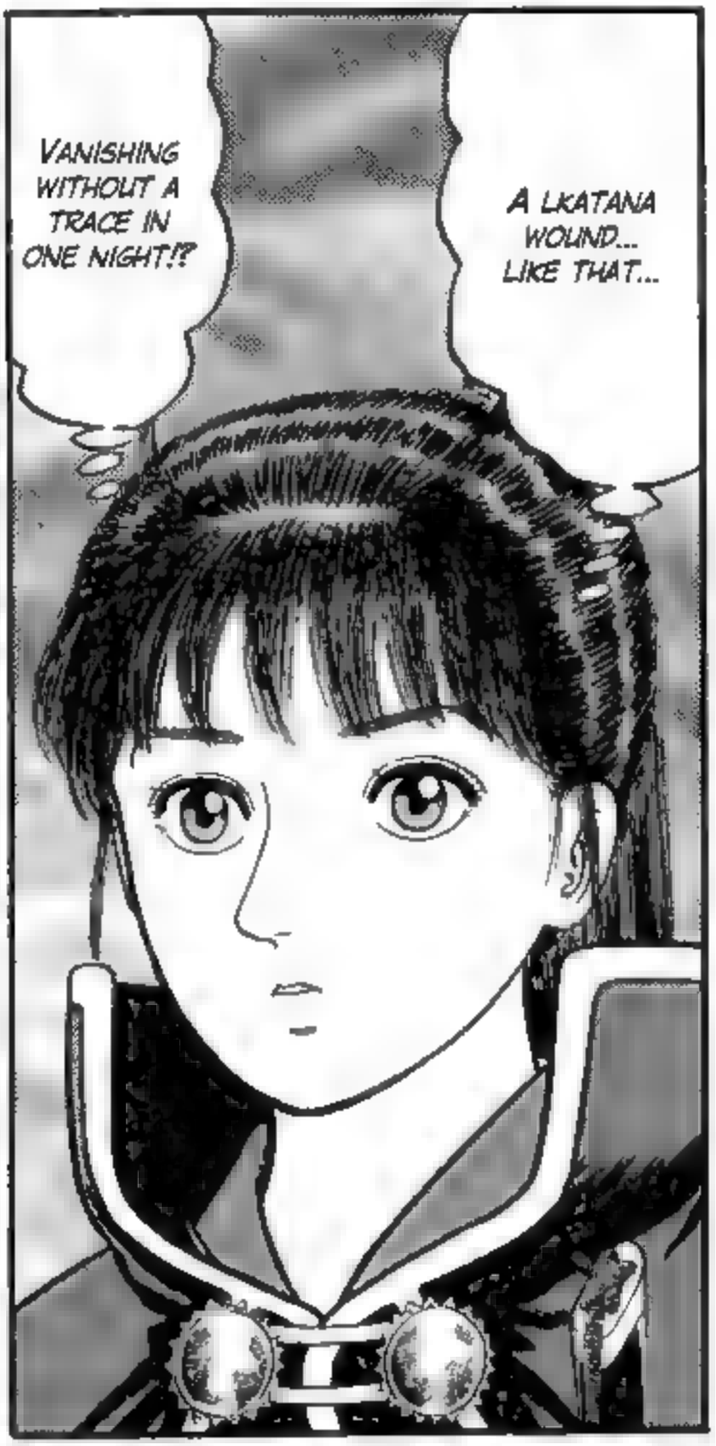
SHIZUNE-SAMA'S WOUNDS VANISH OVERNIGHT WITHOUT EVEN A TRACE!
YEAH! I DID SEE THAT!

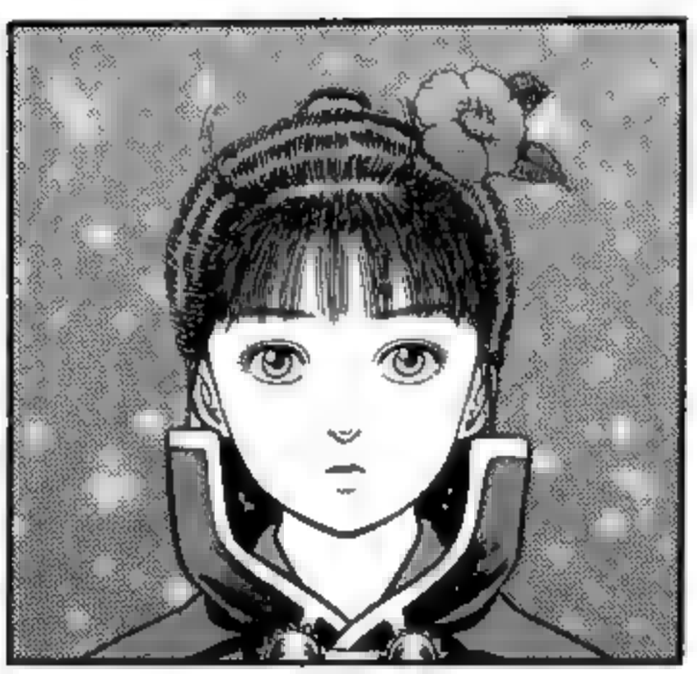
SHIZUNE-SAMA IS THE SON OF GOD!
THAT'S RIGHT!

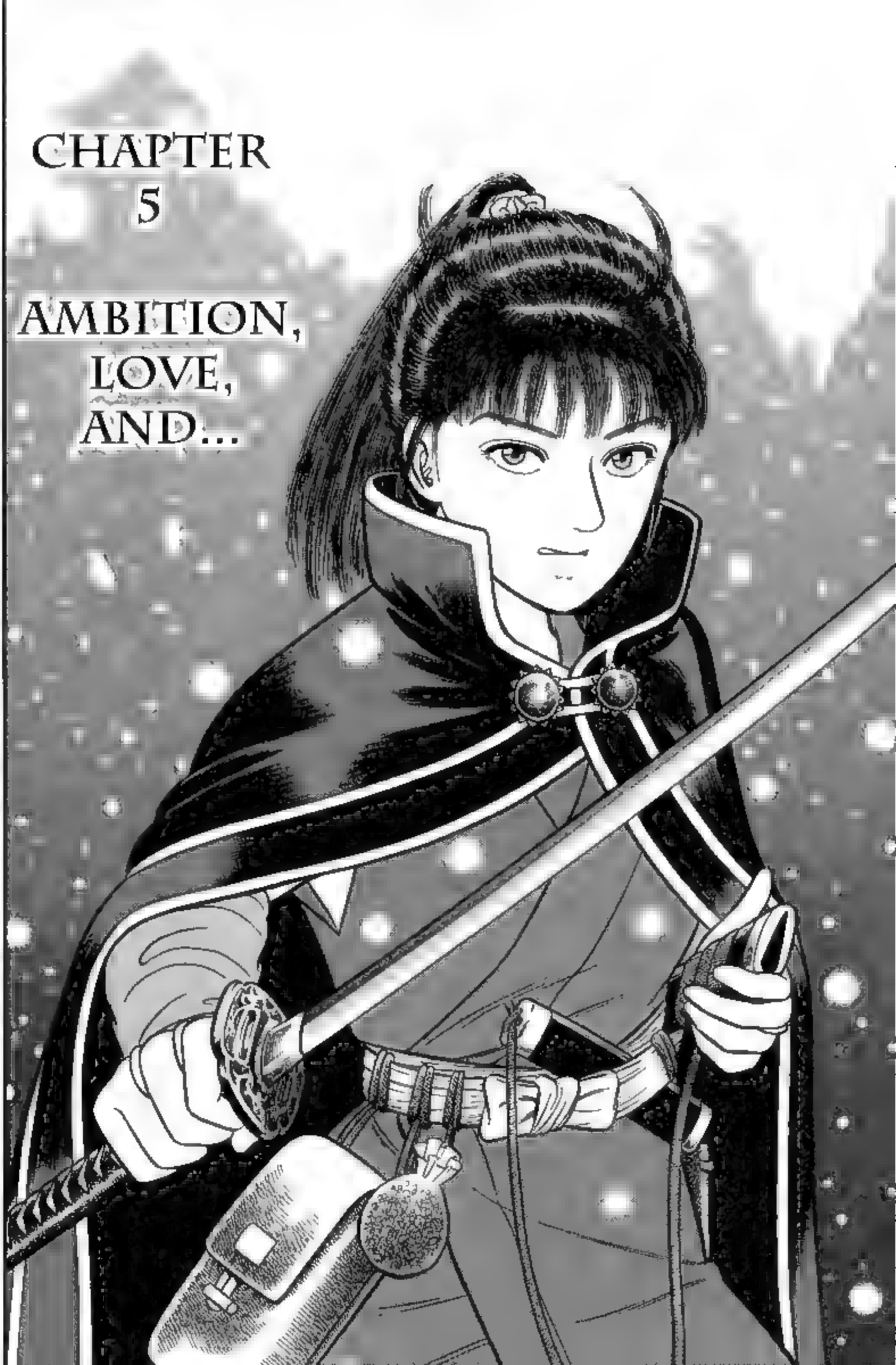
THANK YOU, SHIZUNE-SAMA!
AHHHH! THANK YOU!

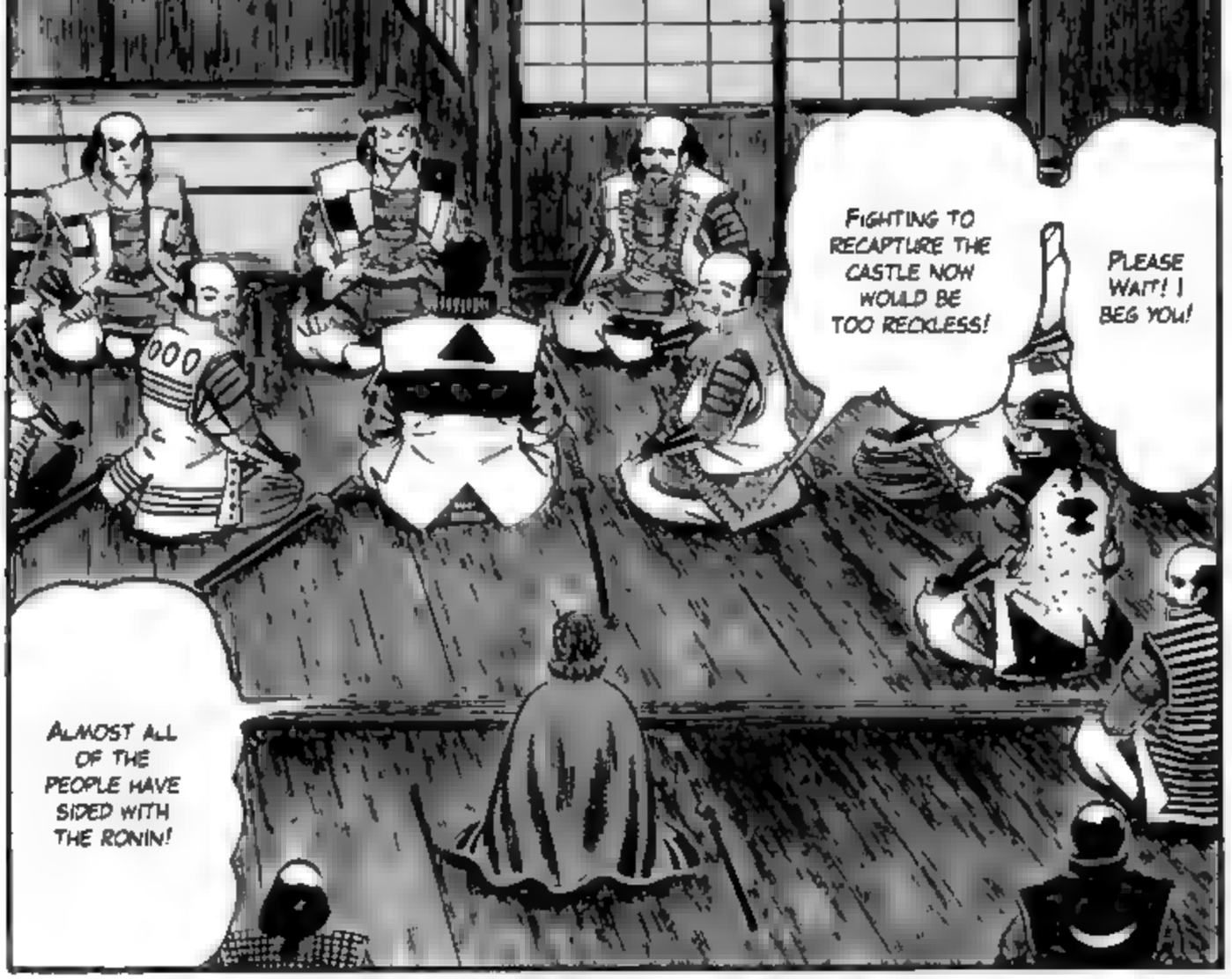
30




VANISHING WITHOUT A TRACE IN ONE NIGHT!?
A KATANA WOUND... LIKE THAT...




CHAPTER
5
AMBITION,
LOVE,
AND...


ALMOST ALL OF THE PEOPLE HAVE SIDED WITH THE RONIN!
FIGHTING TO RECAPTURE THE CASTLE NOW WOULD BE TOO RECKLESS!
PLEASE WAIT! I BEG YOU!

AND A WOMAN BESIDES!
YOU LOOK LIKE YOU'RE STILL A CHILD!
BUT WITH ALL DUE RESPECT,
WE HAD HIGH EXPECTATIONS.

A CAPABLE ENVOY WHO WAS ALSO A SKILLED PROBLEM SOLVER WAS ON THE WAY FROM TENKAI-SAMA.
WE'D BEEN INFO-RMED THAT

SO VERY SKILLED
AND HE EVEN WRITES TO...LEAVE EVERYTHING TO YOU WITHOUT JUDGING YOU BY APPEARANCES BECAUSE YOU'RE

AZUMI-DONO?
JUST WHAT DID YOU DO AND HOW DO YOU OPERATE,
REALLY NOW.

EXPECT ANYTHING FROM AZUMI-DONO FROM THE VERY BEGINNING!
WE DIDN'T
STOP!

COULD IT BE YOUR EFFORTS ARE HAVING THE OPPOSITE EFFECT!?
DIDN'T THIS REBELLION START JUST AFTER YOU CAME HERE!?

3

I CAN'T SETTLE THINGS LIKE THAT...
BUT AS THINGS STAND NOW
TAKING CARE OF THINGS BY KILLING THOSE EIGHT COMMANDERS WOULD'VE BEEN SIMPLE,

KUAHAHAHA HAHAHAHA!
ALL BY YOURSELF!?
YOU SAY IT'S A SIMPLE MATTER TO KILL THOSE EIGHT MEN..?

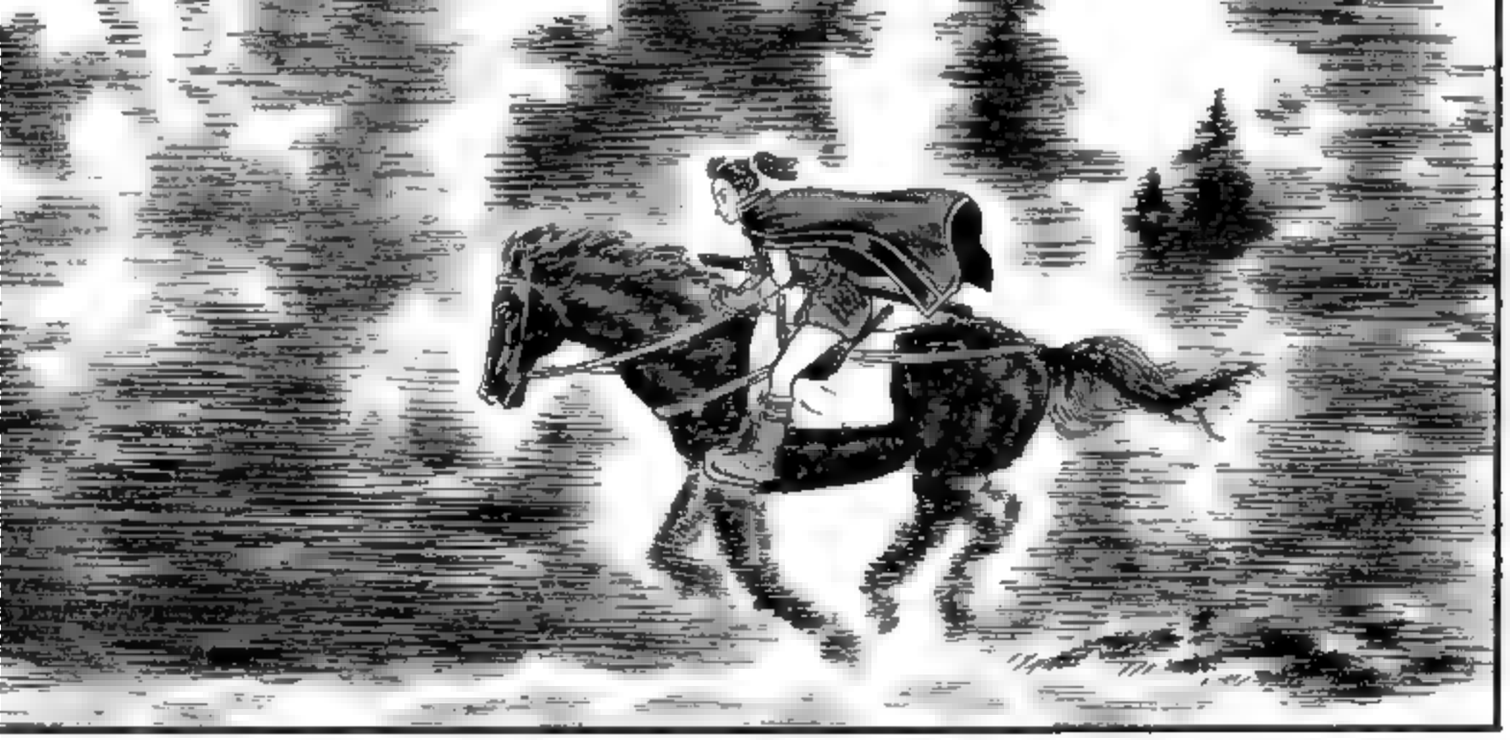
HAHA HAHA!
WELL, WELL, WELL..
ARE YOU REALLY AS SKILLED AT ALL THAT, AZUMI-DONO!?

THEN.. WOULD THAT NOT MAKE HIM THE LEADER OF THE CASTLE TAKEOVER?
THE ONE WHO UNITED THESE RONIN AND ALMOST ALL THE PEOPLE IN THAT CASTLE TO THAT EXTENT WAS SHIZUNE-SAMA.

SHIZUNE-SAMA IS DIFFERENT!
THAT'S RIGHT!
SHIZUNE-SAMA IS NOT SUCH A MAN!
IT'S NOT POSS-IBLE.
NO, IT'S NOT LIKE THAT

THAT BECAUSE OF SHIZUNE-SAMA'S PRESENCE HERE, SUCH A THING WOULD'VE BEEN AVOIDALBE.
WE'D THOUGHT
IS A MAN OF A PURE, DIVINE HEART!
SHIZ-UNE-SAMA

.....
BY SHIZ-UNE-SAMA!
WHO WERE UNIFIED
TRICKED AND MANIPULATED THE PEOPLE
THESE EIGHT MEN



HOW DO I SOLVE IT!?
THIS SIUTATION...
WHAT SHOULD I DO?
TENKAI-SAMA...

ABOUT YESTERDAY... WERE YOU ARE OF THIS PLAN BEFOREHAND?
SO., SHUNJIRO-DONO...

.....
!!
.....
WELL, OF COURSE I KNEW ALL ABOUT IT!

.....
HAVE YOU DISCOVERED THEM ALREADY, AZUMI...?
SO...I ASSUME THAT YOU ALSO OBVIOUSLY KNOW..ABOUT THOSE CANNONS POSITIONED AT THE COUNTRY'S BORDERS?

A BIT..
.....
ARE YOU SURP-RISED?
I WHO DESPISED AND LOATHED THE MILITARY AS MUCH AS I DID?

I THOUGHT
ABOUT THE MISSION YOU WERE ON SO MANY TIMES, AZUMI!
HOW HUMILI-ATING.
AT THAT TIME.. I WAS AN IMMATURE YOUTH WHO DIDN'T KNOW THE VASTNESS OF THE WORLD, NOR ABOUT REALITY.

SATISFIED.
THERE ARE ALMOST NO PEOPLE WHATSOEVER WHO ARE FULLY
IN HUMAN SOCIETY
THAT'S RIGHT...
TO ERASE THE FEW WHO BRING ABOUT WAR...ALL FOR THE SAKE OF A PEACEFUL SOCIETY.

.....
THAT IS REALITY!
JUST A FEW WHO GET THERE BY SACRIFICING OTHERS!
.....
AND THEN THOSE WITH POWER AND AUTHORITY HAVE TO COOPERATE WITH THE MAJORITY!
I THINK SO AS WELL...
WRONG!
THIS IS...
IF THAT DOESN'T HAPPEN, THE THE FEW AT THE TOP WILL SACRIFICE THE MAJORITY FOR THEIR OWN SELFISH DESIRES!

A RIDICULOUS THING LIKE THAT HAPPENED!
AND ALL THANKS TO THE IRRATIONAL DELUSIONS OF THE FEUDAL LORD WHO HELD THE POWER IN MY DOMAIN,

AND MY FATHER, MY BROTHER, EVEN MY MOTHER...

.....
.....
THAT WAS WRONG!

WHAT THE STRUCTURE OF AN IDEAL COUNTRY WOULD LOOK LIKE...
I...KEPT CONSIDERING

I FIRMLY BELIEVE IT CAN BE REALIZED IN THIS FIEF!
I FIRMLY BELIEVE!

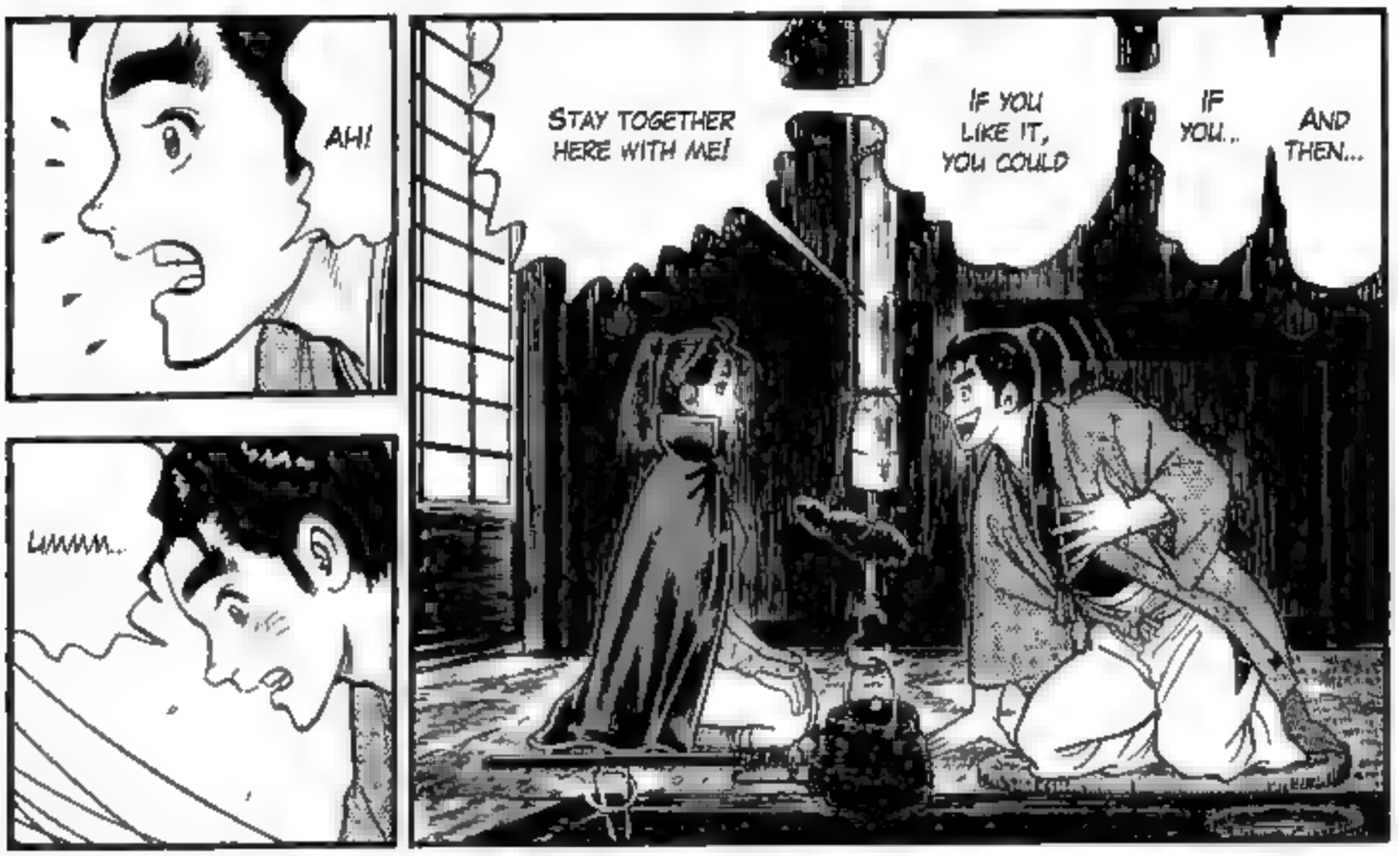
ALL MEN ARE EQUAL IN THE EYES OF GOD!
MAKES NO DISTINCTION BETWEEN RICH AND POOR.
THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINED THAT SHIZUNE PREACHES
IN OTHER WORDS, IT COMPLETELY DENIES THE DISTINCTIONS AMONG US!
WHAT A WONDROUS DOCTRINE!

OF AN IDEAL LAND IS POSSIBLE!
I AM CERTAIN THAT THE BUILDING
IN THIS FIEF, WHERE THAT DOCTRINE HAS COME TO PERMEATE THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF PEOPLE,

ARE FOR THE PURPOSE OF DEFENSE!
THE CANNONS ARE THE BORDER
ONE REQUIRES POWER!
BUT FOR A HOUSE TO BE BUILT OF SOMETHING STRONGER THAN MERE SAND..

AZUMI-SAN!

AZUMI-SAN, PLEASE LEND ME YOUR HELP TO BUILD AN IDEAL COUNTRY HERE!!
LET'S BUILD IT TOGETHER IN THIS FIEF!

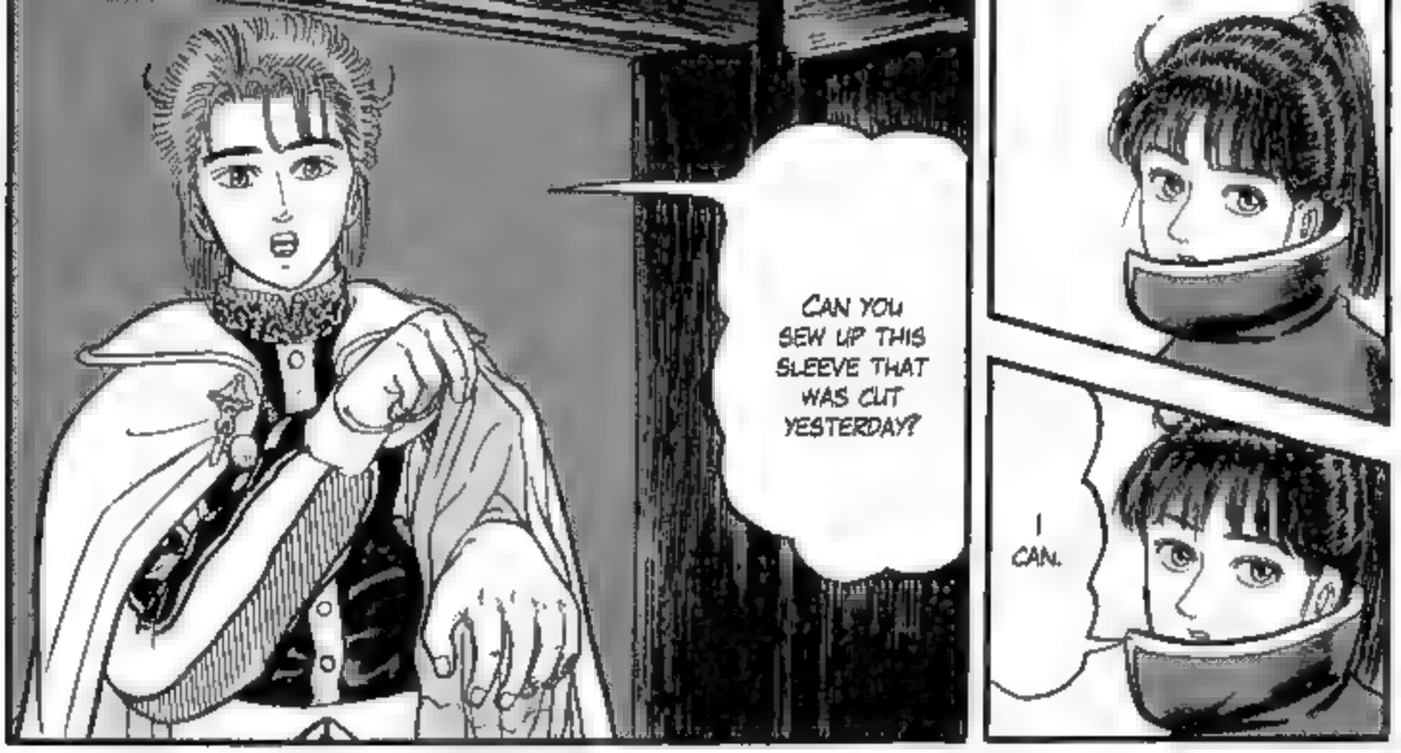

AH!
STAY TOGETHER HERE WITH ME!
IF YOU LIKE IT, YOU COULD
IF YOU..
AND THEN...
UMMM..

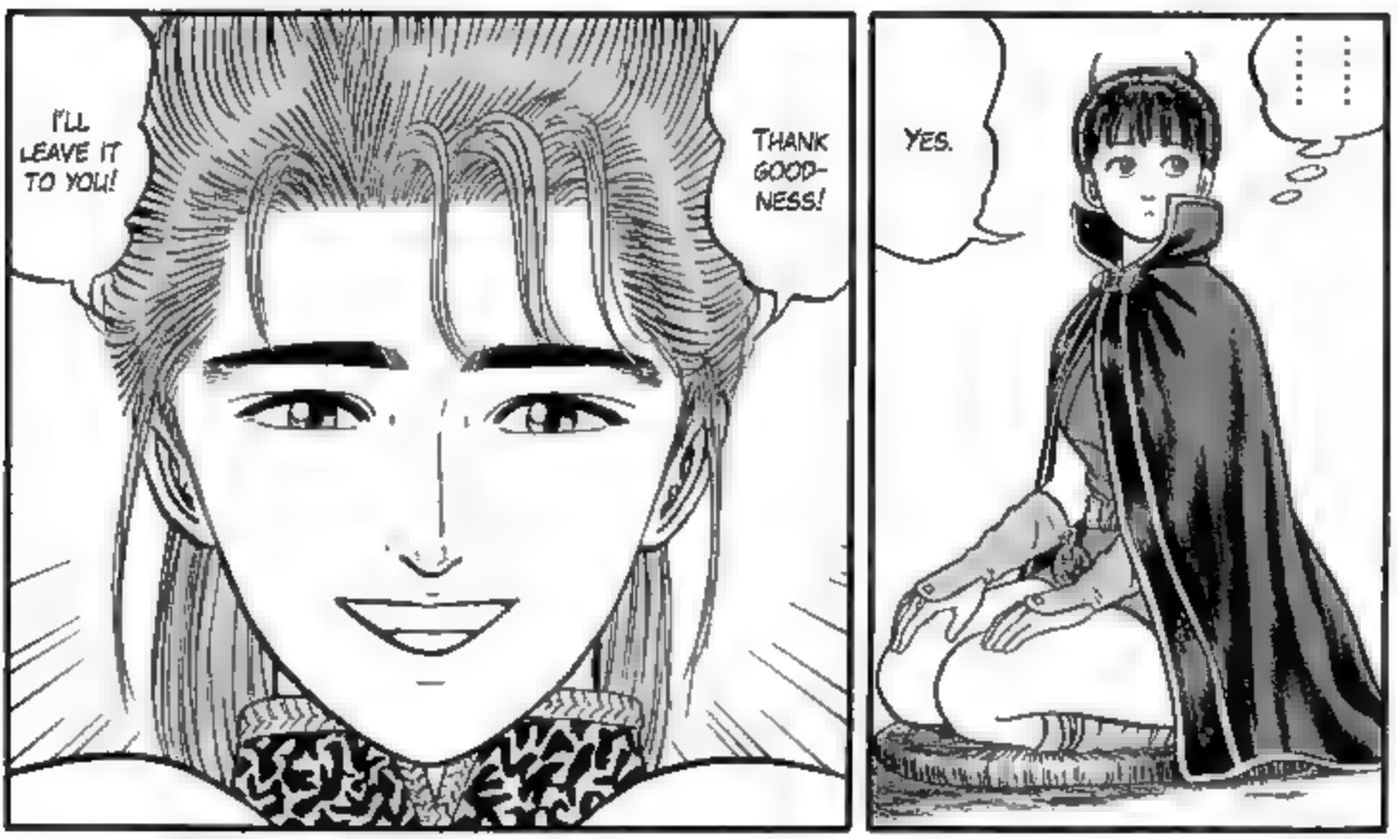
SHUN-JIRO!
ドタドタドタ
.....
.....

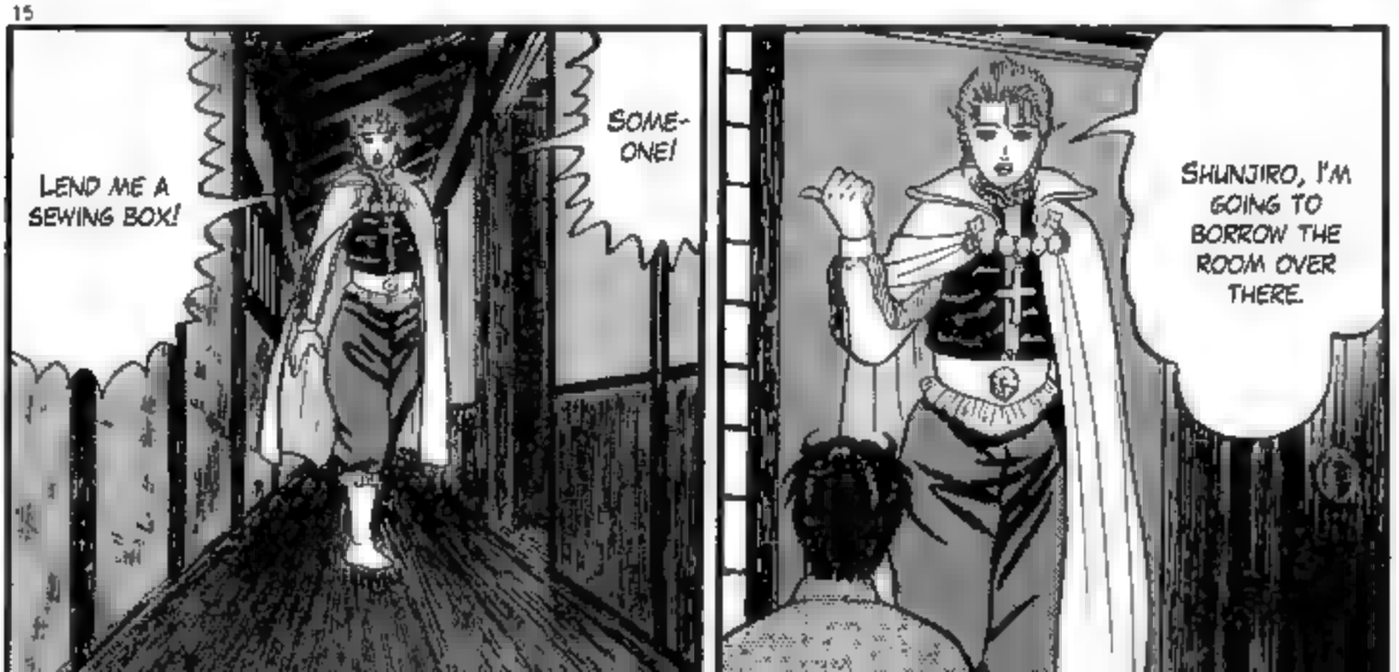
I'VE RETURN FROM PERSUADING THE SAMURAI AT THE CASTLE TO DESIST IN RISING UP FOR NOW

.....
I SEE..

ARE YOU CAPABLE OF NEEDLE-WORK?
AZUMI
UNITE!? TRULY, SHIZUNE-SAMA..?
THOSE WITH DIFFERENT IDEALS SLOWLY UNITE...
FROM NOW ON, I'M GOING TO MAKE

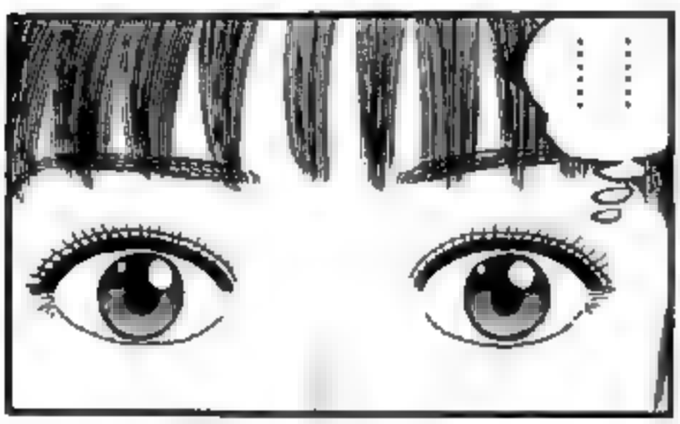

CAN YOU SEW UP THIS SLEEVE THAT WAS CUT YESTERDAY?
I CAN.


I'LL LEAVE IT TO YOU!
THANK GOOD-NESS!
YES.
.....


LEND ME A SEWING BOX!
SOME-ONE!
SHUNJIRO, I'M GOING TO BORROW THE ROOM OVER THERE.

CAN YOU DO IT LIKE THIS, WITHOUT ME UNDRESSING?
GOOD!
I CAN DO THAT.
THEN, PLEASE PROCEED!

FOR ME, A WOUND LIKE THIS WILL VANISH OVERNIGHT, WITH NOT EVEN A SINGLE SCAR!
.....


.....

DIDN'T I SAY IT'D BE GONE WITHIN A SINGLE NIGHT?
HM? THE SWORD WOUND?

HOW!?
AH!?!

RUNNING ABOUT TO PERSUADE THE SAMURAI...
I WAS SO BUSY TODAY SHOWING OTHERS PEOPLE THAT ARM... REASSURING THEM..

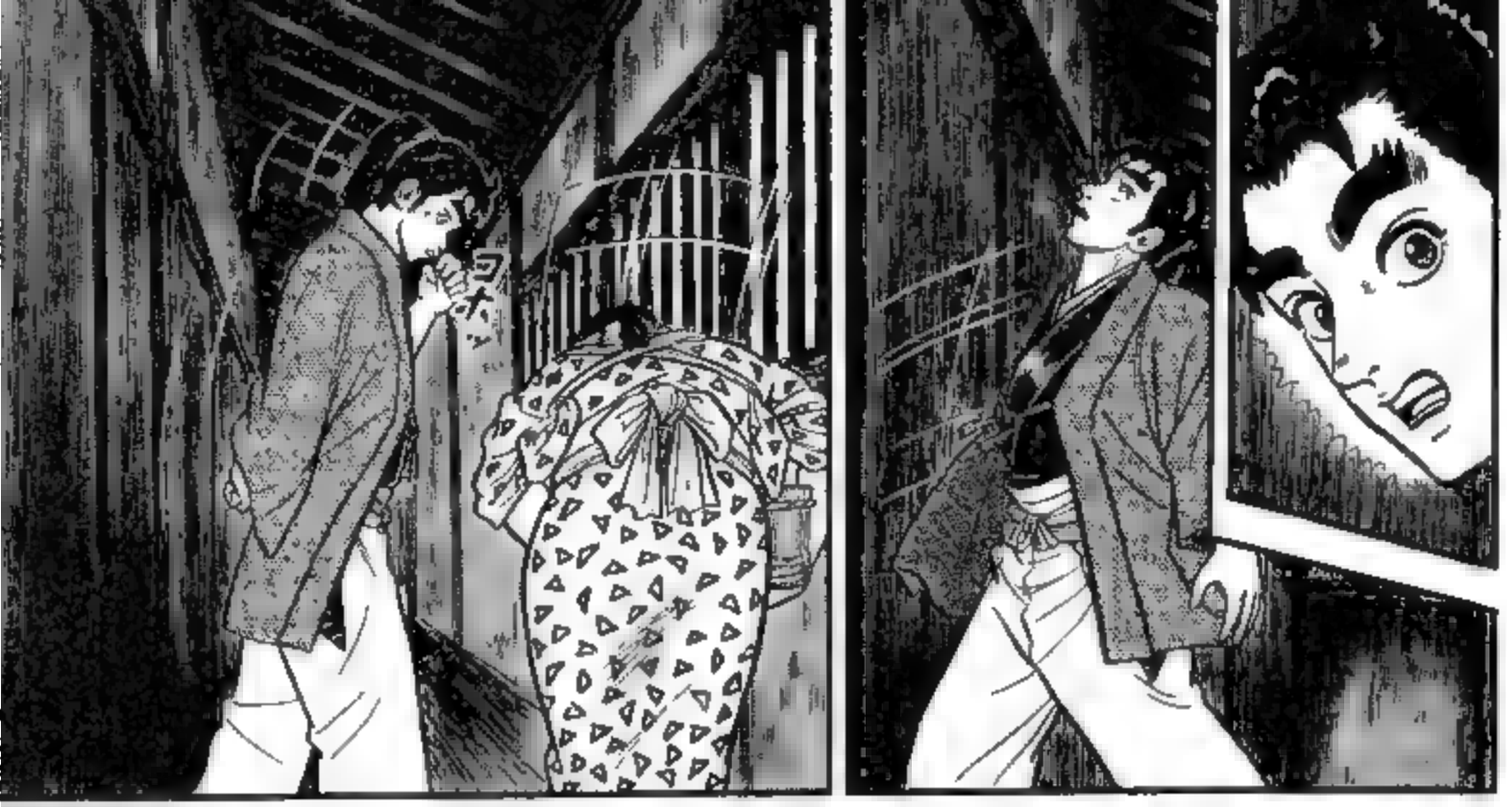
B-BUT THAT'S UNBELIE-VABLE!

IT'S A TRICK, HUH?
LIKE THE ONE YOU SHOWED ME THAT ONE TIME?
WHAT MANNER OF TRICK?
UMMM...
FOR INSTANCE, YOU ATTACHED YOUR ARM TO A DEVICE THAT LOOKS LIKE A KATANA WOUND IN ADVANCE...AND THEN...
NO...THERE'S NO WAY SOMETHING THAT COMPLEX COULD GO JUST AS PLANNED TO THAT EXTENT..

IT'S A TRICK, HUH?
LIKE THE ONE YOU SHOWED ME THAT ONE TIME?
WHAT MANNER OF TRICK?
UMMM...
FOR INSTANCE, YOU ATTACHED YOUR ARM TO A DEVICE THAT LOOKS LIKE A KATANA WOUND IN ADVANCE...AND THEN...
NO...THERE'S NO WAY SOMETHING THAT COMPLEX COULD GO JUST AS PLANNED TO THAT EXTENT..

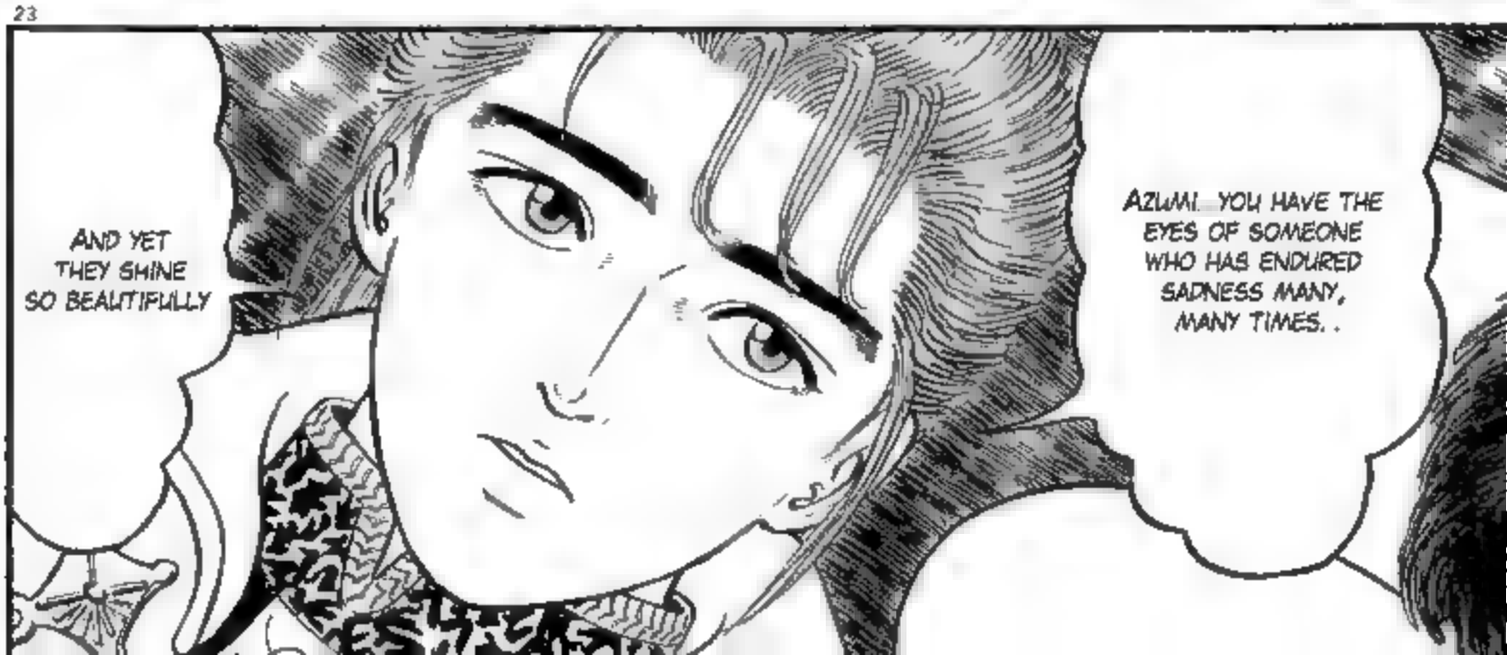
IT'S A MYSTERY TO ME AS WELL... WHY IT VANISHES IN BUT A SINGLE NIGHT...
UH...
PLEASE HURRY AND SEW IT
IS IT REALLY TRUE?
.....
OH, YES.

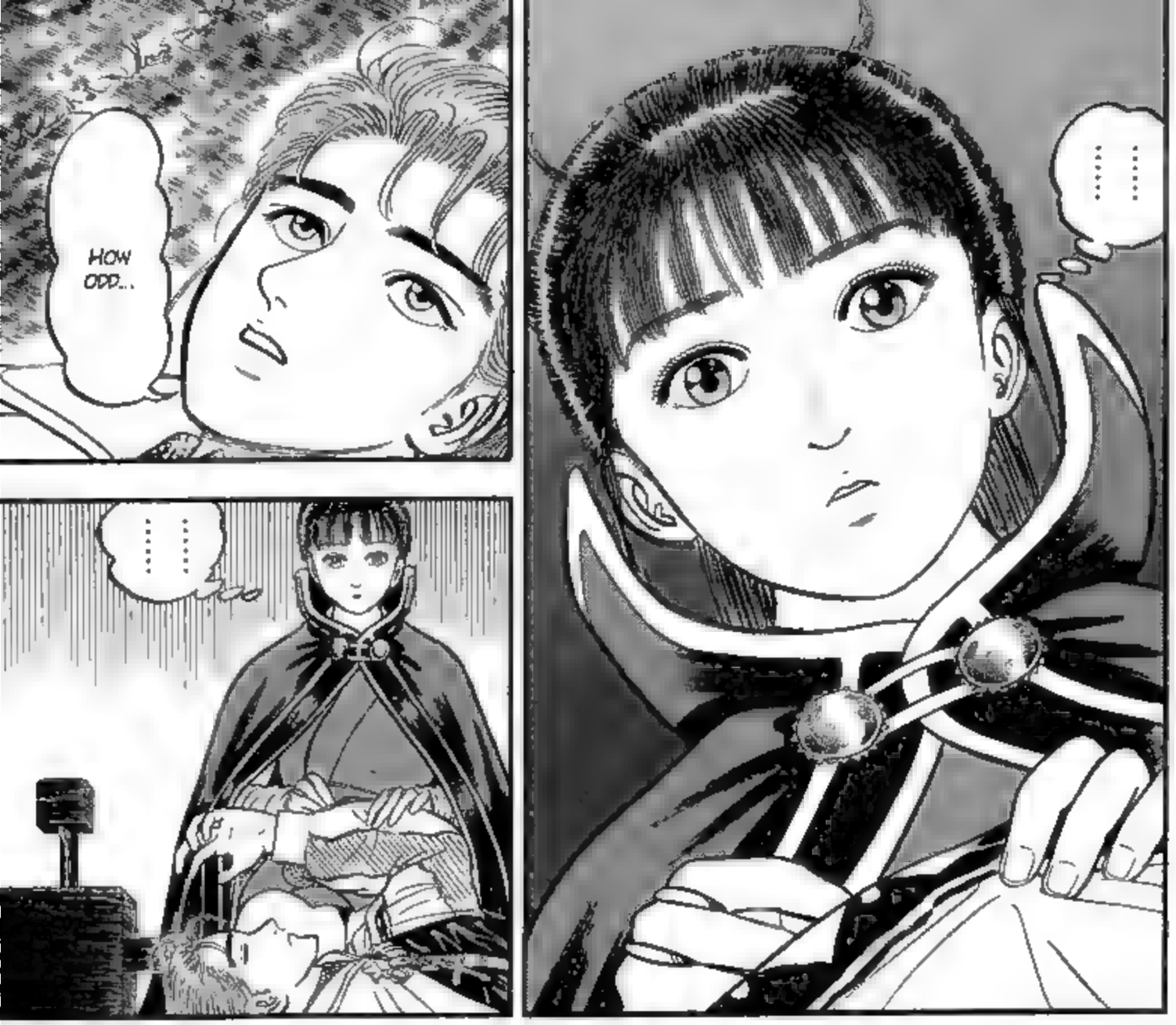
.....
.....

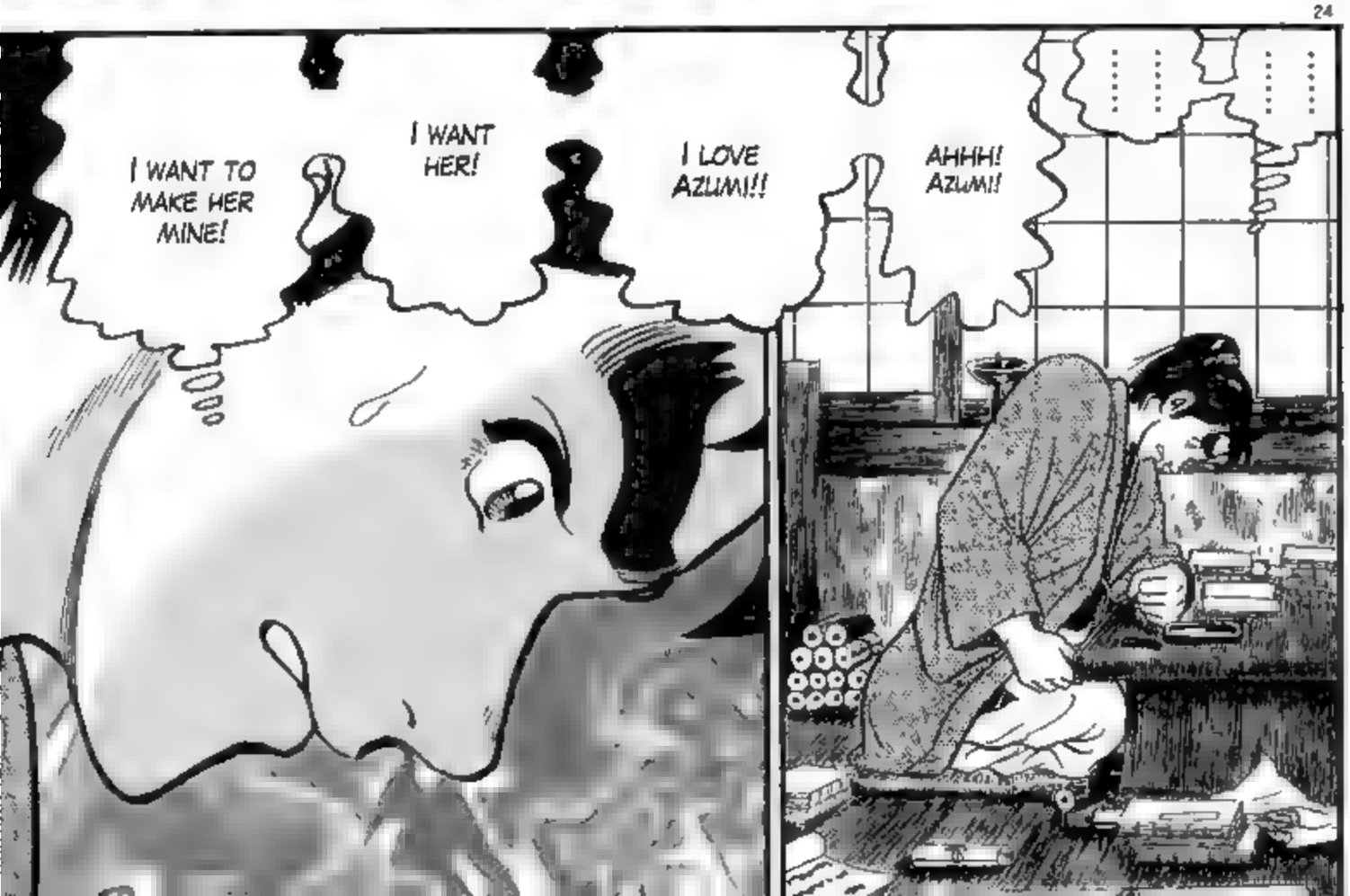


.....
EVEN FROM A MAN'S VIEWPOINT, SHIZUNE.
IS HANDSOME AND CHARMING.
THE NOTION THAT HE AND AZUMI-SAN
SHARE A MUTUAL ATTRACTION
IS GREATLY POSSIBLE.

DON'T STARE AT ME LIKE THAT
.....


AND YET THEY SHINE SO BEAUTIFULLY
AZUMI. YOU HAVE THE EYES OF SOMEONE WHO HAS ENDURED SADNESS MANY, MANY TIMES..


HOW ODD...
.....
.....
.....


I WANT TO MAKE HER MINE!
I WANT HER!
I LOVE AZUMI!!
AHHH! AZUMI!
.....
.....
.....

THANK YOU!
YES!
DONE!
OK!

ALRE-ADY?
AH...
I'M GOING BACK.

THANK YOU.
I SEE.
.....
I LEAVE IT TO YOU!

I ONLY CAME TO TELL YOU THOSE THINGS. I STILL HAVE TO HURRY ABOUT AND PERSUADE THE OTHERS.

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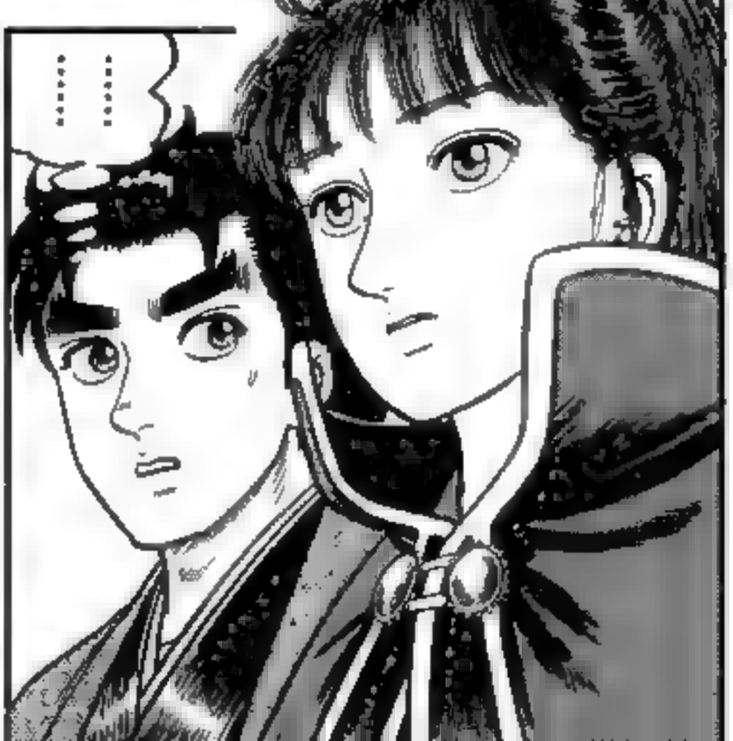
……

SLOWLY UNITING GROUPS WITH DIFFERENT IDEALS...
DO YOU THINK SUCH A DREAM CAN BE REALIZED?
……

I DO NOT
I BELIEVE CONFLICT IS INEVITABLE.
……
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WHAT SHOULD I DO?
WHAT SHOULD I DO TO SUPPRESS IT?
……
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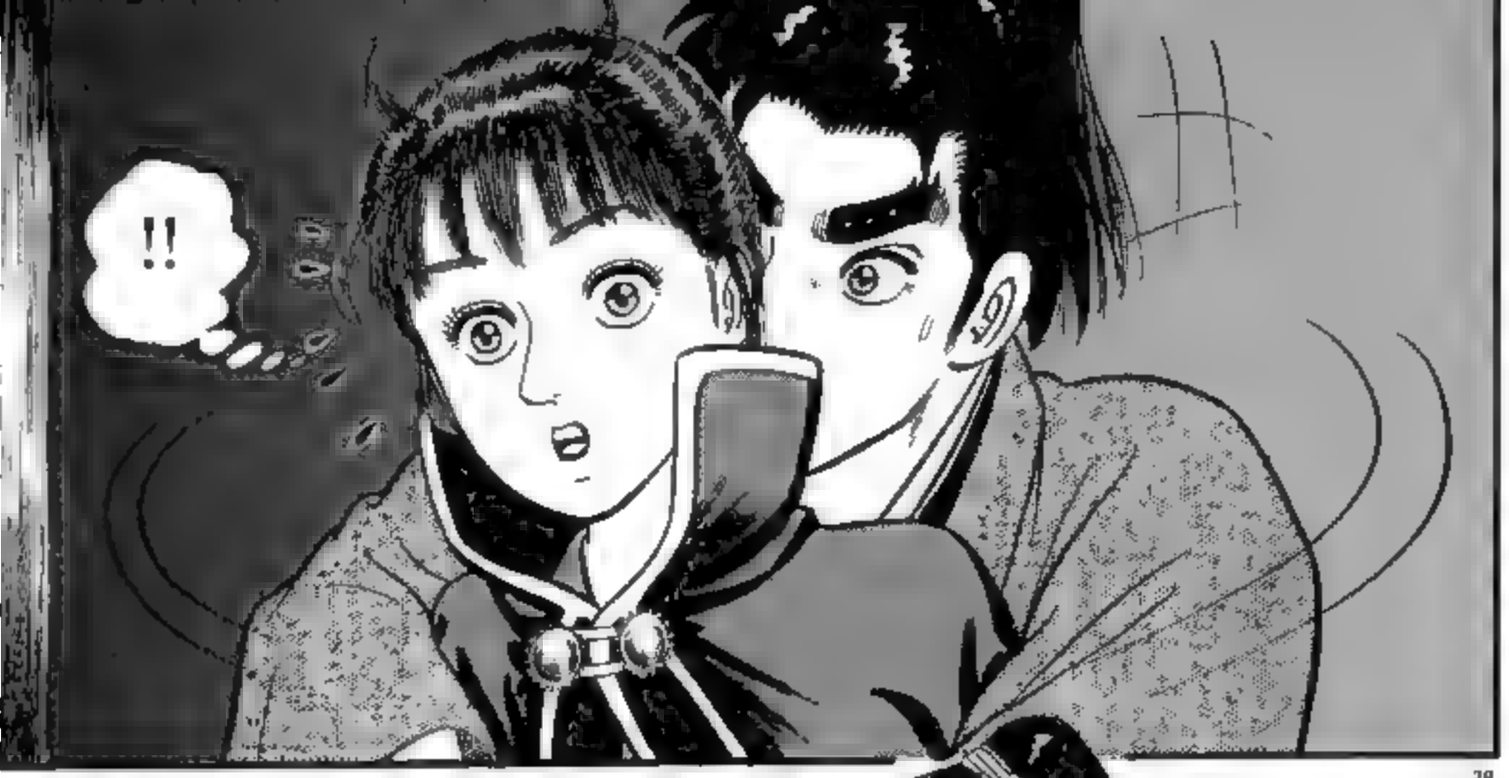
!!

AZUMI!
I LOVE
YOU!

.....

.....
.....

MEETING YOU LIKE THIS AGAIN... IT'S A MIRACLE!
I FEEL SO BLESSED!
AZUMI-SAN..
I WANT YOU!
29

CHAPTER 5: THE RASETSU ARRIVE

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……
I'M SORRY! THAT WAS SO SUDDEN!
BUT I NEEDED TO BE FRANK WITH YOU, NO MATTER WHAT!
……
……
……
……
……
……
D-DID I.... OFFEND YOU?

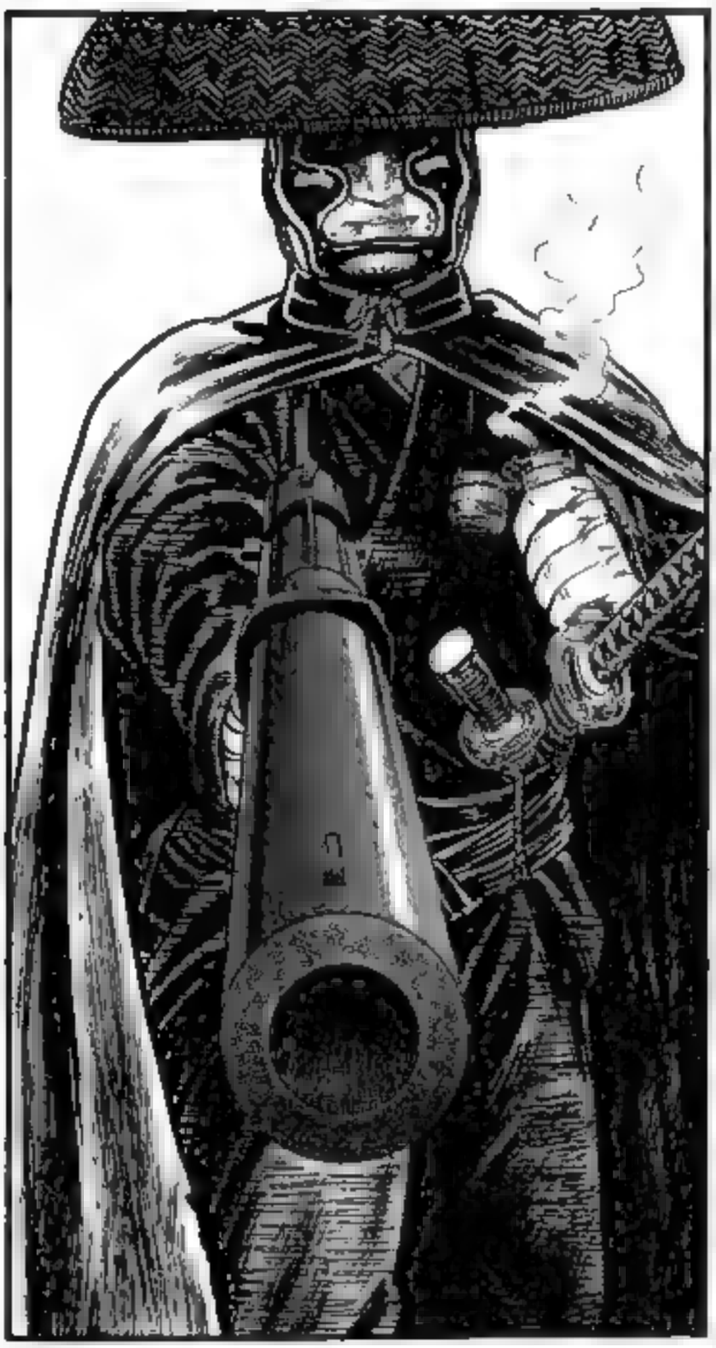
OH... THANK YOU...
LET'S EAT...
TOGHE-THER!
OKAY?

WHAT KIND OF WOMAN IS THAT!?
.....

I'LL NEVER BACK DOWN!
NO!
.....

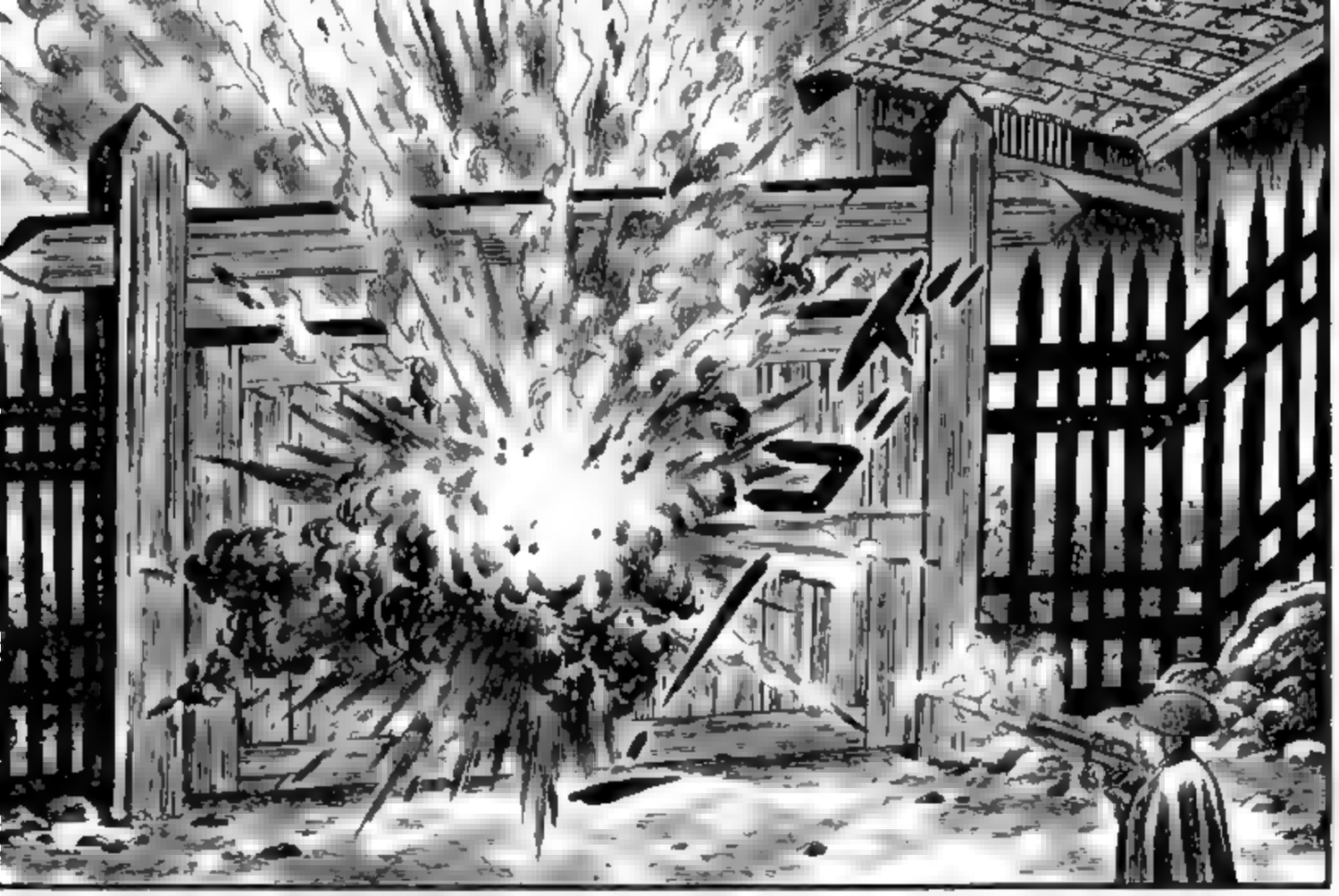
FIGURED IT OUT, DID YOU? YOU WERE JUST A COMFORT WOMAN TO HIM!

GO BACK!
THEREFORE, WE CANNOT ALLOW YOU TO PASS.
WE WEREN'T INFORMED OF YOUR ARRIVAL.
WHAT DO WE DO!?
MAYBE WE GOT HERE TOO EARLY.
DIDN'T THEY KNOW YET?



WE GO THROUGH OF COURSE.

WH-WHAT THE-!?
WAH!



WHAT HAPP-ENED !?
EEE EEE!
WH-WHAT WAS THAT!?

ウカ…!!

KILL THEM!
KILL THEM!
KIIIILL THEEEM!
DON'T LET THEM !!!IN!
GUAAH!
ズボ

SEEMS THEY'VE COME TO PICK US UP.
SO THEY'VE ARRIVED ALRE-EADY. ...
OHH...
AH...
WE CAME TO INFORM THE LAND'S BORDER GUARDS OF YOUR ARRIVAL.
WELL, WELL. YOU'VE COME EARLY.
BUT ONCE AGAIN, YOU...
PUT ON QUITE THE SHOW ...

THE LORD OF THIS FIEF AND HIS SAMURAI WERE SO ACCUSTOMED TO PEACE...
IT MADE EVERYTHING SO SIMPLE.

OHH.
THEY'RE ALREADY HERE!

THE MEN OF RASETSU-KARASU HAVE ARRIVED.

12

IT SEEMS THEY WERE
ON STANDBY NOT FAR FROM HERE.
RESTLESSLY WAITING FOR THE SIGNAL.
HAHAHA!

AH, GENSAI-DONO.
LONG TIME, NO SEE!
AH, THERE YOU ARE!

WE'LL BE ABLE TO GO ON A RAMPAGE AGAIN, EH?

TO YOUR HEARTS' CONTENT!
OF COURSE! RAMPAGE AGAIN!

YOU SAY HIS WOUNDS FROM A KATANA JUST VANISH IN A SINGLE NIGHT WITHOUT A TRACE!?

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE, BUT IT'S TRUE.
THAT IS BECAUSE SHIZUNE-SAMA IS THE SON OF GOD!

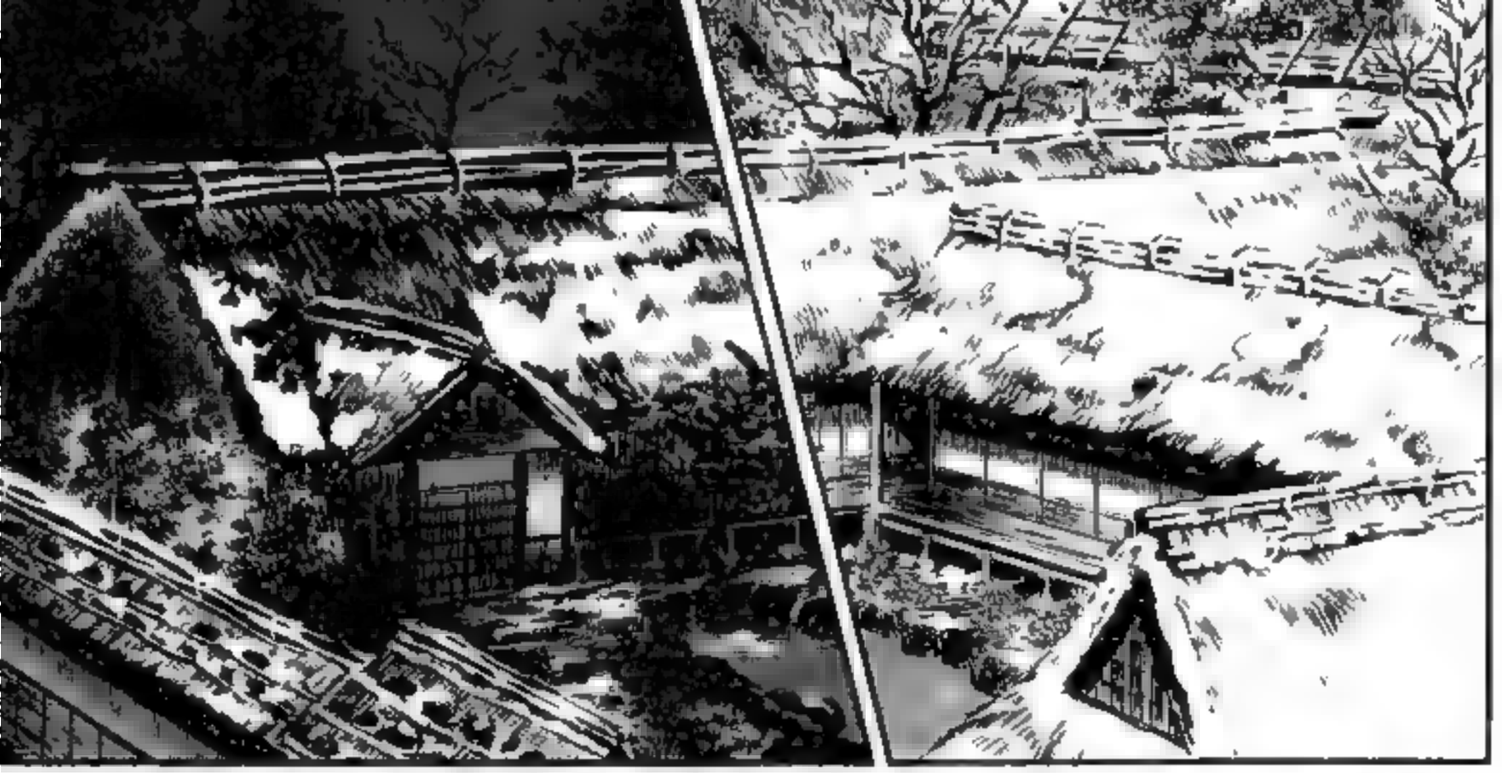
HEHEHE ...
WHILE BEING KEPT IN THE DARK OF OUR TRUE PURPOSE...

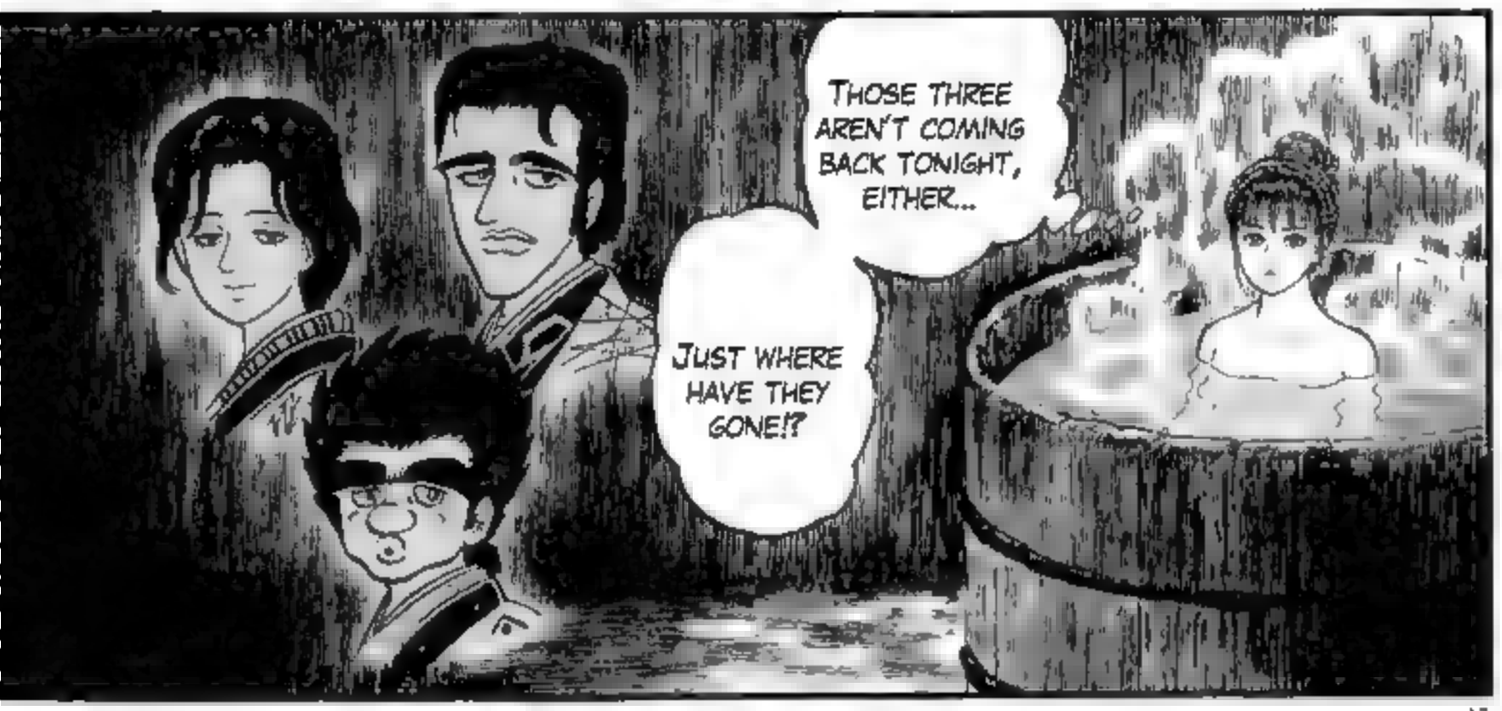
AND THAT SON OF GOD GIVES US HIS SUPPORT

AND SPEAKING OF HAVING A FOREIGN PARENT, IT SEEMS THE SAME IS TRUE FOR AZUMI-DONO.
IT'S SAID HIS FATHER WAS A FOREIGN MISSIONARY!
SHIZUNE-SAMA HAS A RARE, RAVISHING BEAUTY, EVEN THOUGH HE'S A MAN!
SHE'S A WOMAN WHO SEEMS TO BE A DISTANT RELATION TO THE LORD OF THESE LANDS, WHO RECENTLY RETURNED!
YEP!
AZUMI, YOU SAY!?
AZUMI !?
AND SHE'S GOT A REALLY CUTE FACE!
SHE HOLDS A RATHER ODD, LONG KATANA.
SHE'S STILL A YOUNG GIRL, BUT IT SEEMS SHE KNOWS SOMETHING ABOUT SWORDPLAY.
HOW OLD IS SHE!?
WHAT IS SHE LIKE!?
DO YOU KNOW HER?
WHAT IS IT?
AZUMI...
.....

I'VE HEARD RUMORS OF A YOUNG GIRL NAMED AZUMI...
WHO SINGLEHANDEDLY ANNIHILATED A GROUP OF BRIGANDS OCCUPYING A POST TOWN!
WITH SKILL THAT CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED AS OTHERWORDLY, SHE SLEW SEVENTY... OR MAYBE EVEN A HUNDRED OF THESE BANDITS!

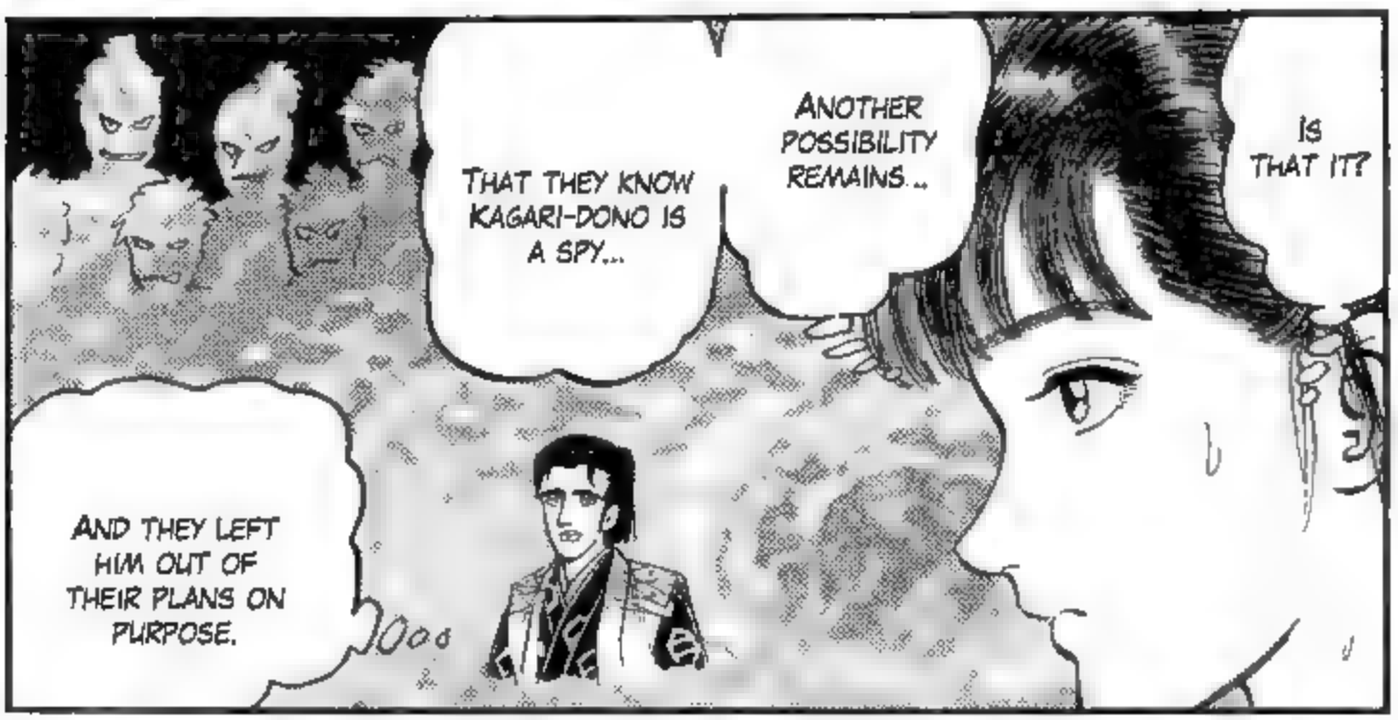
.....
.....
THESE TWO AZUMIS ARE DIFFERENT PEOPLE!
NO WAY!




THOSE THREE AREN'T COMING BACK TONIGHT, EITHER...
JUST WHERE HAVE THEY GONE!?

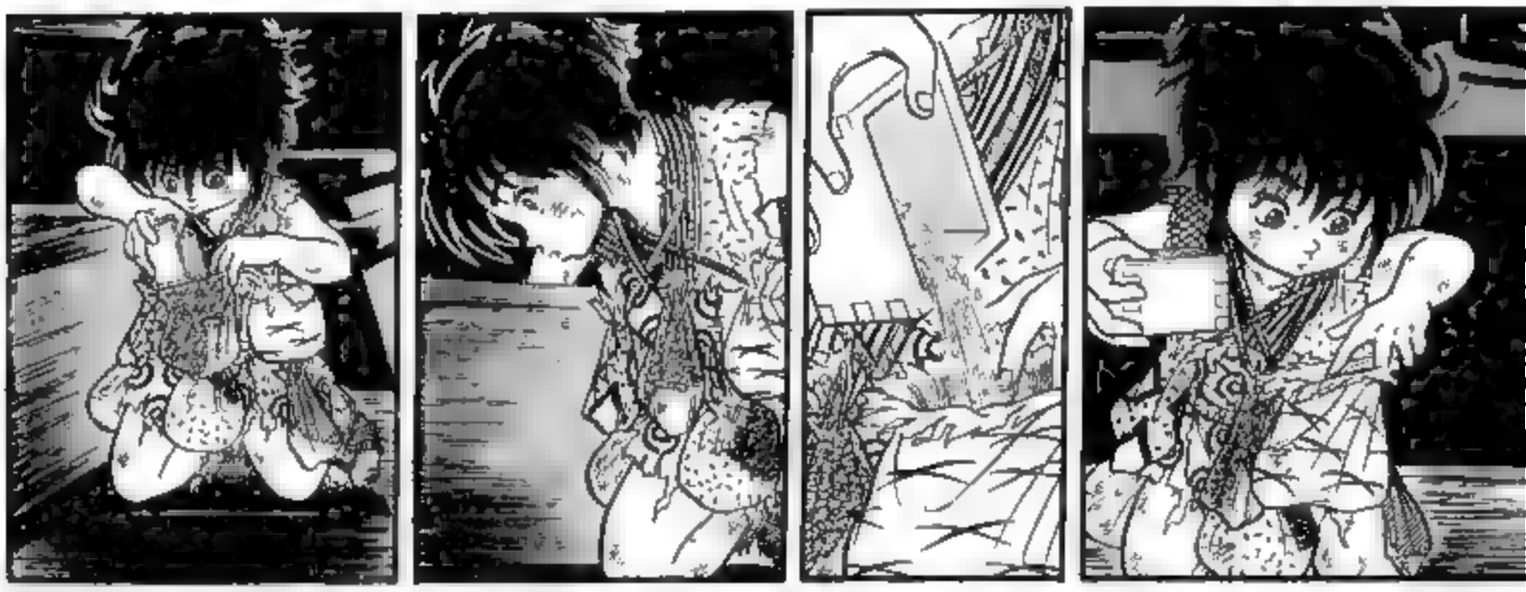
DIDN'T HAVE ANY KNOWLEDGE OF YESTERDAY'S PLAN IN ADVANCE, EVEN THOUGH HE INFILTRATED THE RONIN...
EVEN THOUGH MOST OF THE POPULACE IS IN THE DARK ON THESE PLANS...IT'S UNNATURAL THAT KAGARI-DONO

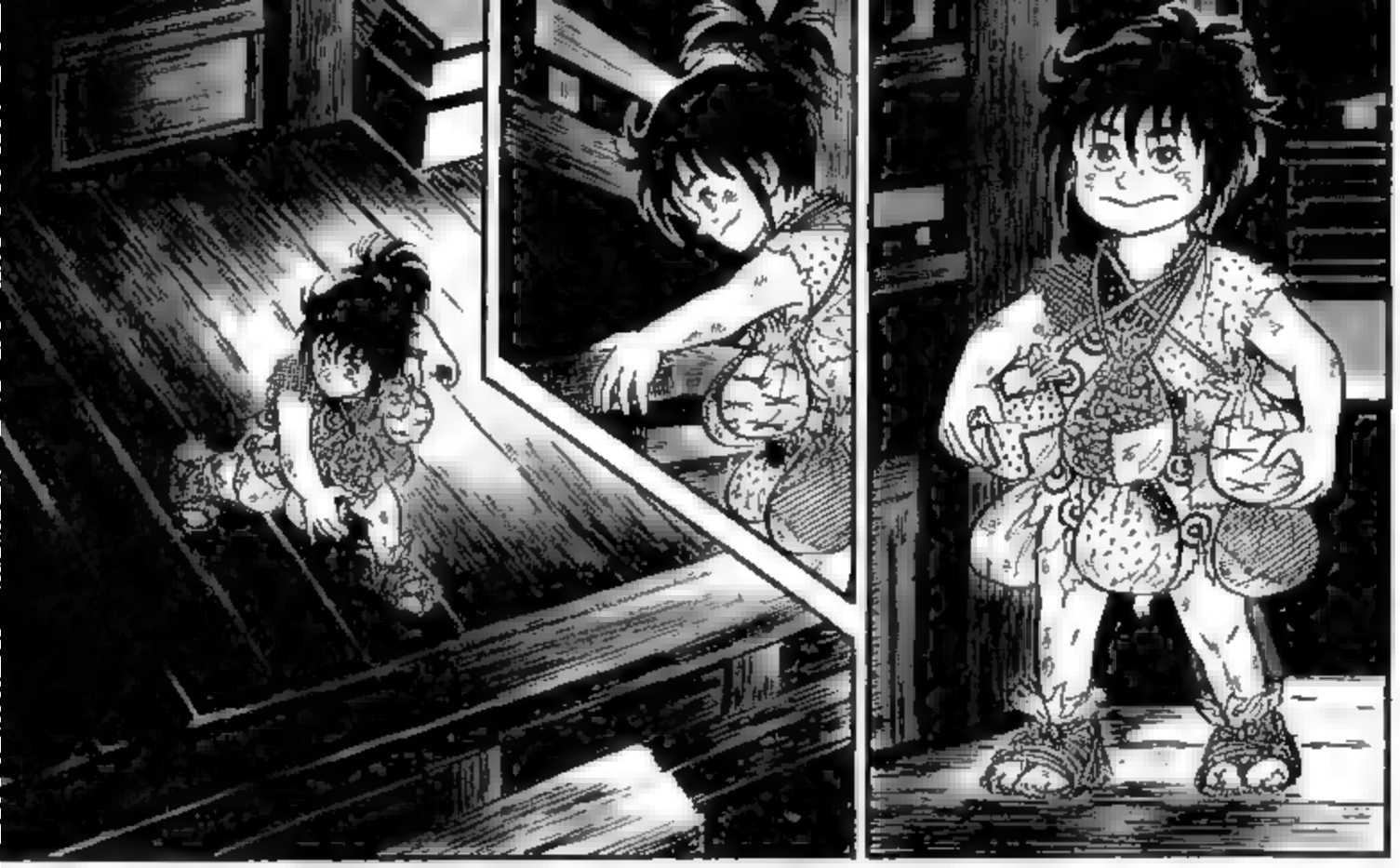
THE CHRISTIAN BELIEF MAKES THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF PEOPLE CHANGE...
THOUGH THOSE FOUR WHO INFILTRATED ARE YOUR COMRADES, I CAN'T SAY IF THEY WERE INFLUENCED OR NOT.
DON'T TRUST THEM COMPLETELY.

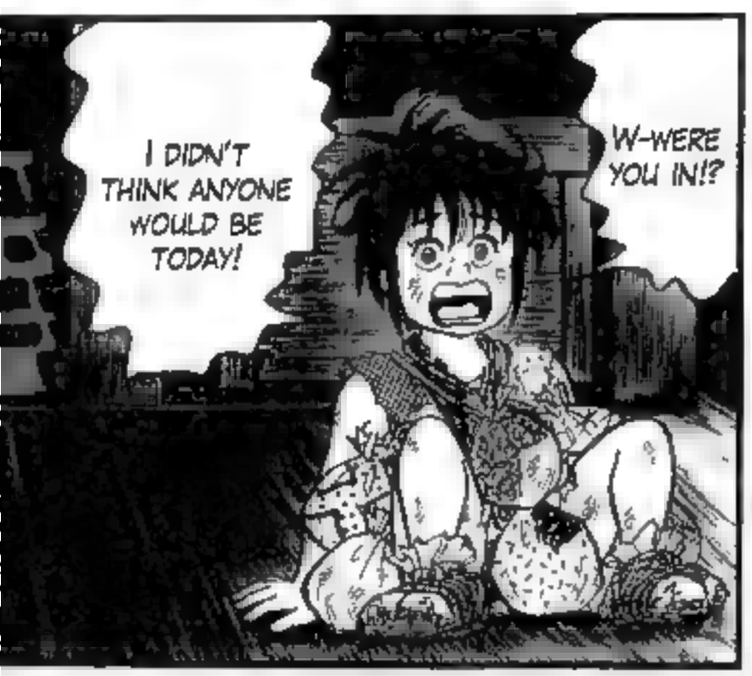

IS THAT IT?
ANOTHER POSSIBILITY REMAINS...
THAT THEY KNOW KAGARI-DONO IS A SPY...
AND THEY LEFT HIM OUT OF THEIR PLANS ON PURPOSE.

IN THAT CASE, THOUGH...
WOULDN'T HATSUNE-DONO AND UTSUBO-DONO HAVE BEEN CAPTURED AS WELL?

……






I DIDN'T THINK ANYONE WOULD BE TODAY!
W-WERE YOU IN!?

……
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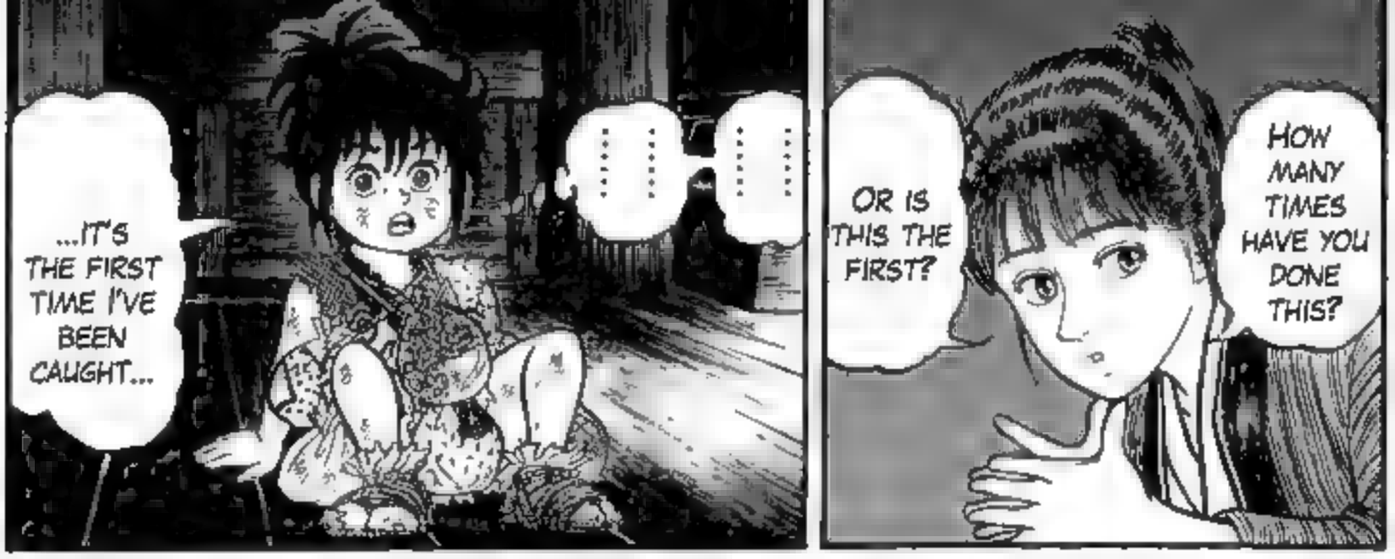
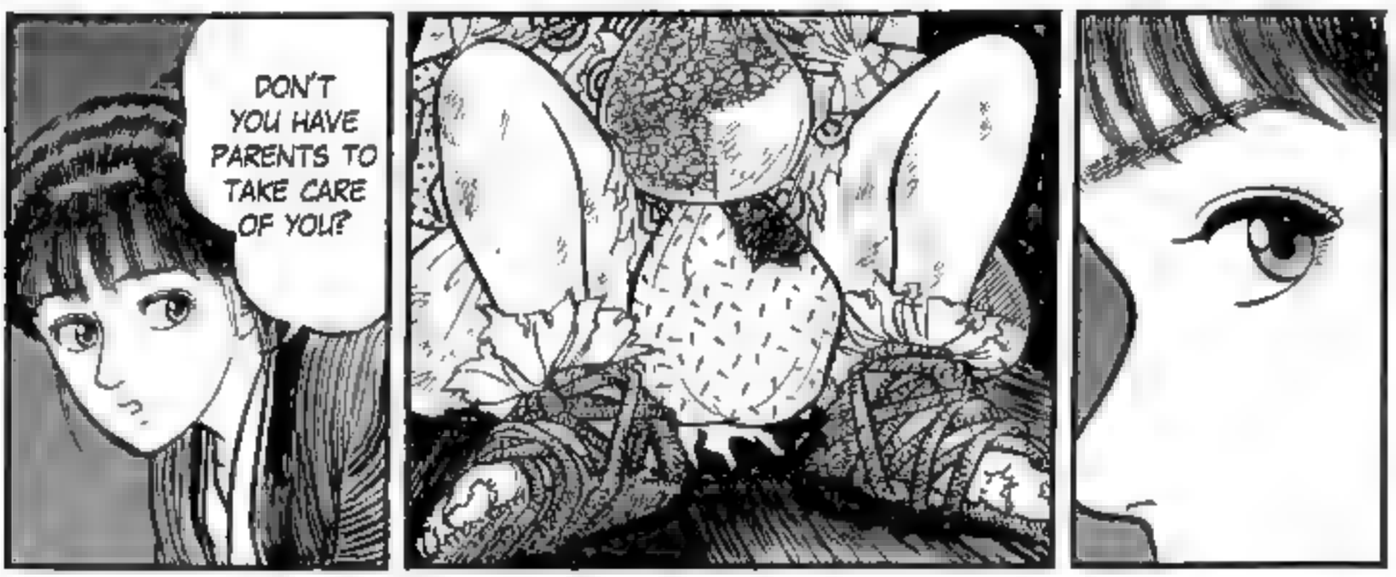
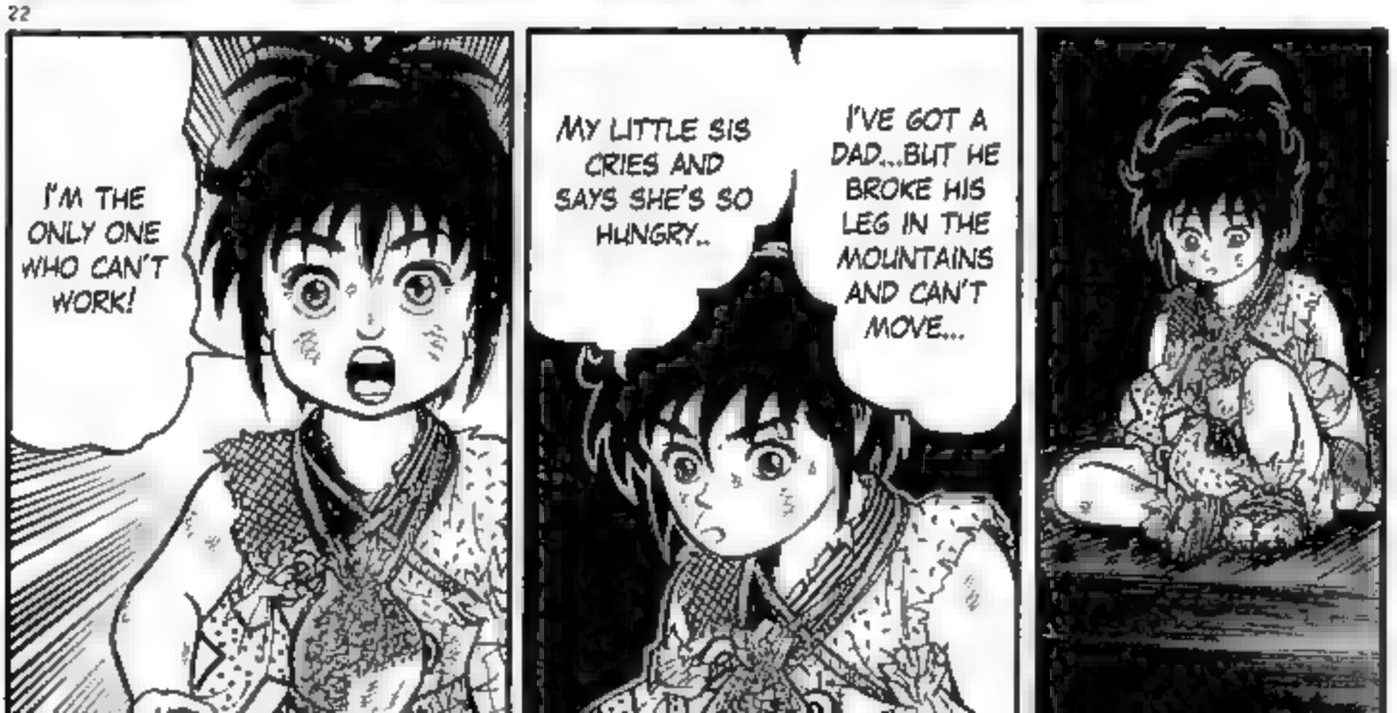
I'M IN!
YEP!
ALL ALONE!


.....
...IT'S THE FIRST TIME I'VE BEEN CAUGHT...
HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU DONE THIS?
OR IS THIS THE FIRST?

.....


DON'T YOU HAVE PARENTS TO TAKE CARE OF YOU?


I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN'T WORK!
MY LITTLE SIS CRIES AND SAYS SHE'S SO HUNGRY..
I'VE GOT A DAD...BUT HE BROKE HIS LEG IN THE MOUNTAINS AND CAN'T MOVE...

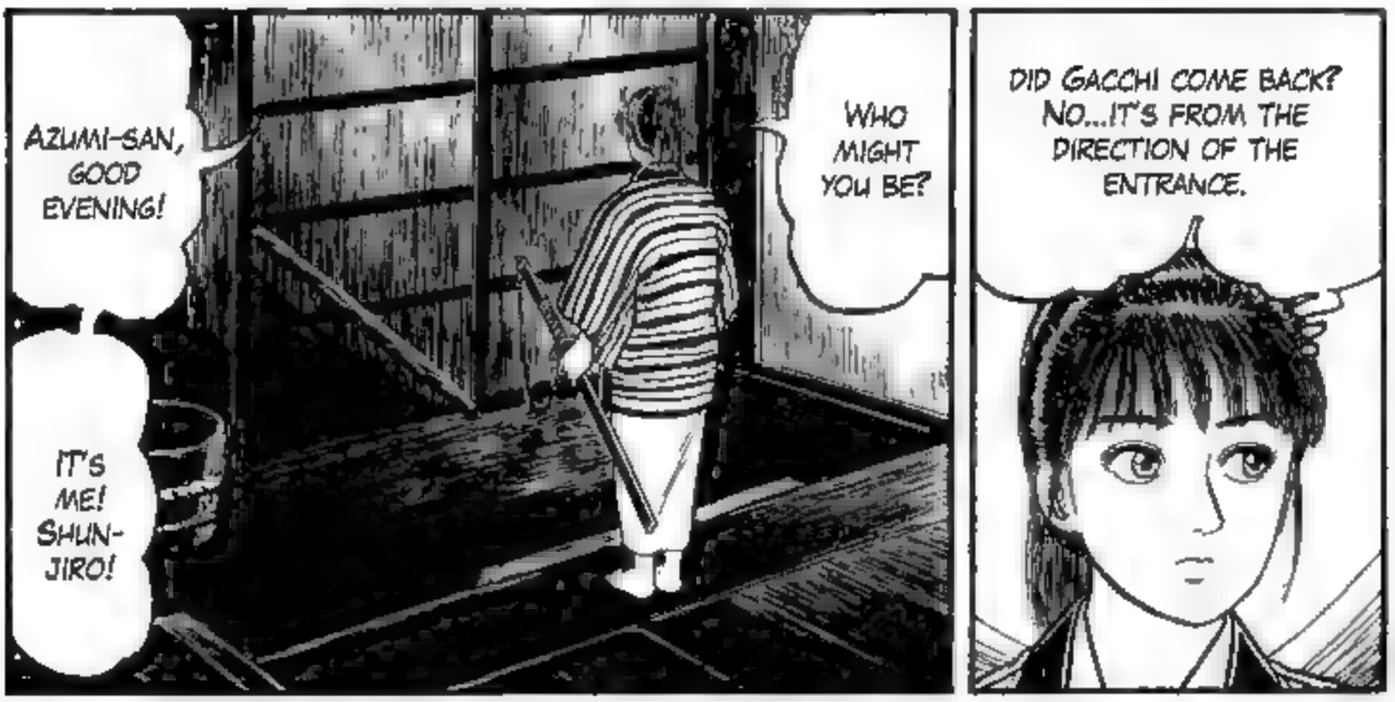
I'LL PRETEND I DIDN'T SEE YOU!
THEN.
.....
I SEE.
.....
HEHE!
RIGHT !?
I OWE YOU ONE!
THOSE BAGS ARE A GOOD IDEA!

AND IF I TIE THEM TOGETHER LIKE THIS, THEY DON'T SPILL!
SO I THOUGHT ABOUT IT,
I'D TRIP AND EV-ERYITHING WOULD FALL OUT!
BEFORE, WHEN I'D RUN AWAY WITH A HUGE BAG ON MY BACK,

OH, RIGHT.
YES!
YOU THO-UGHT IT OUT WELL!
AND IT'S EASIER WHEN I RUN!

YEP!
A-ARE YOU SURE!?
.....
IT'S COLD OUT THERE. SO WEAR THIS.

AZUMI!
TELL ME YOUR NAME! I'LL GET YOU SOMETHING TO THANK YOU!
YOU'RE A WEIRD GIRL...
.....
YEAH.
SO BE CAREFUL!
AZUMI-NEECHAN, WHEN YOU'RE TOO GOOD-NATURED, YOU MAKE A FOOL OUT OF YOURSELF,
YOU CAN CALL ME GACCHI!
.....
SEE YA!
OHH...SO CHILLY!


AZUMI-SAN, GOOD EVENING!
IT'S ME! SHUN-JIRO!
WHO MIGHT YOU BE?
DID GACCHI COME BACK? NO...IT'S FROM THE DIRECTION OF THE ENTRANCE.

SORRY FOR COMING AT SUCH A LATE HOUR!
!!

I WANTED TO GIVE YOU A PRESENT, AZUMI-SAN, BUT IT TOOK UNTIL THIS LATE TO FINISH MAKING IT...
WHAT IS IT?

THIS!
A... PRESENT! FOR ME!?

IT'S BEAU-TIFUL!
AHH!
I WONDER WHAT IT IS!
YOU MADE IT...?

IT'S MADE OF GOLD!

IS IT REALLY OKAY FOR ME TO HAVE IT!?
IT MUST BE REAL VALUABLE IF IT'S MADE OF GOLD!
AMA-ZING!
OHHH!

PUT IT AROUND YOUR NECK!
OF COURSE! IT REPRESENTS MY FEELINGS FOR YOU!

IT SUITS YOU...
.....
.....
.....
THANK YOU...

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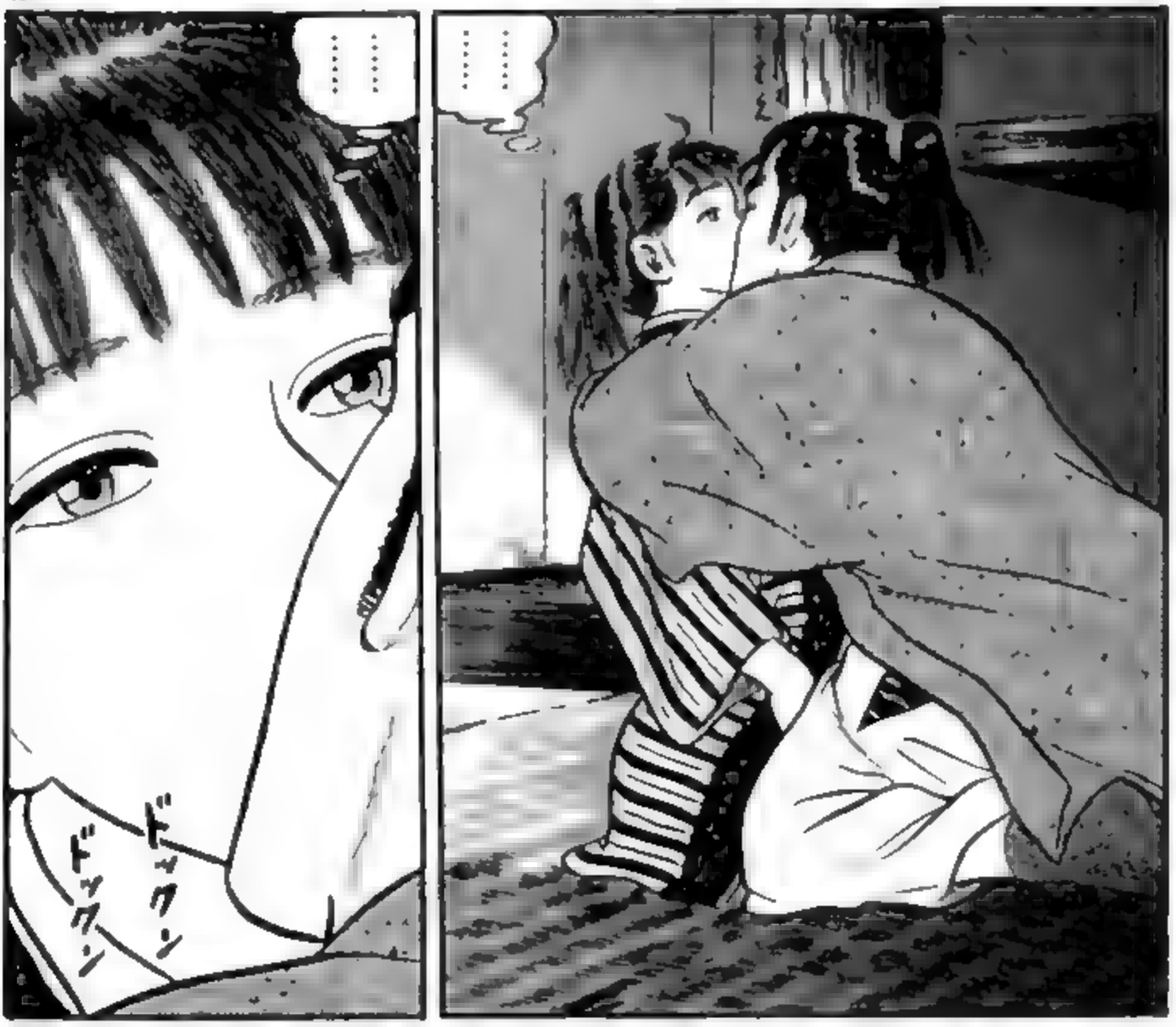


CHAPTER 7: THE TEST OF THE RASETSU

!!

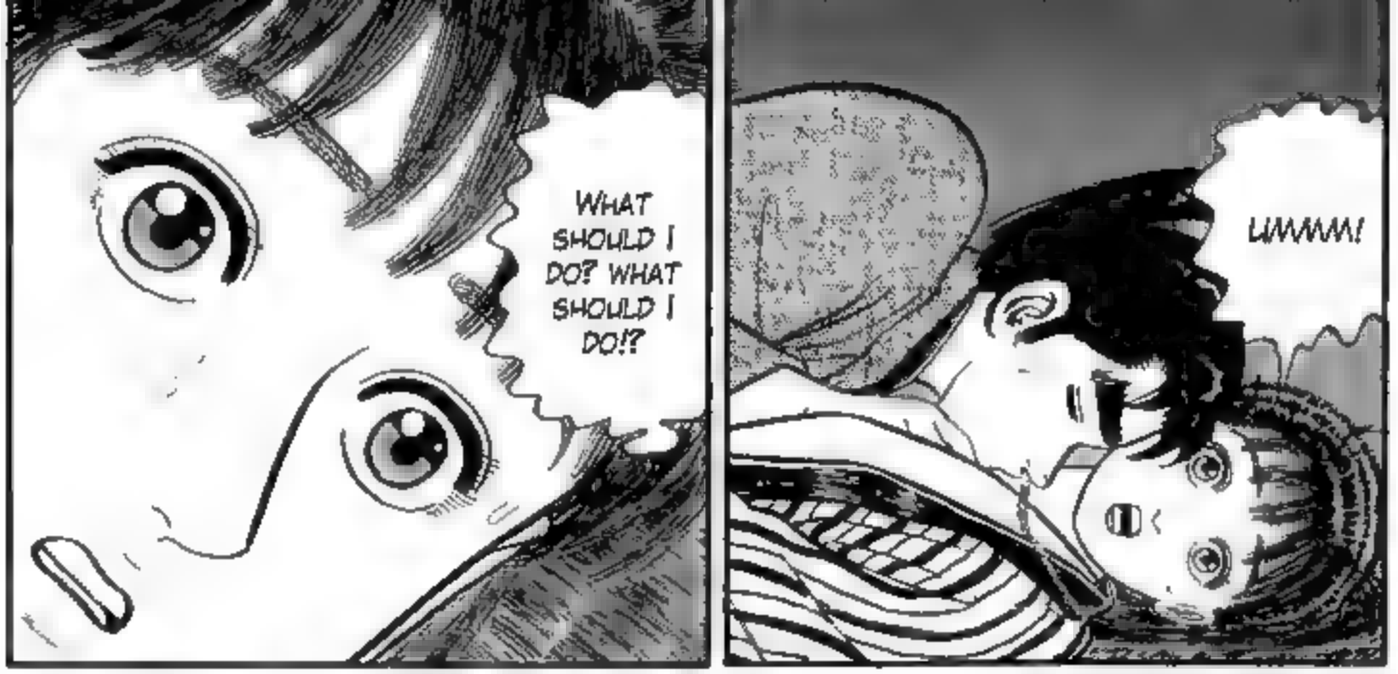
AZUMI-
SAN!

I
LOVE
YOU!

MMM!
AZUMI-
SAN!

!!

AZUMI-SAN!
WAIT..A MINUTE...
UMM ...


WHAT SHOULD I DO? WHAT SHOULD I DO!?
UMMMM!

W-WAS THERE SOMEONE ELSE!?
.....

.....
THERE'S... SOMEONE THERE...

TOBIZARU, YOU CAME BACK?

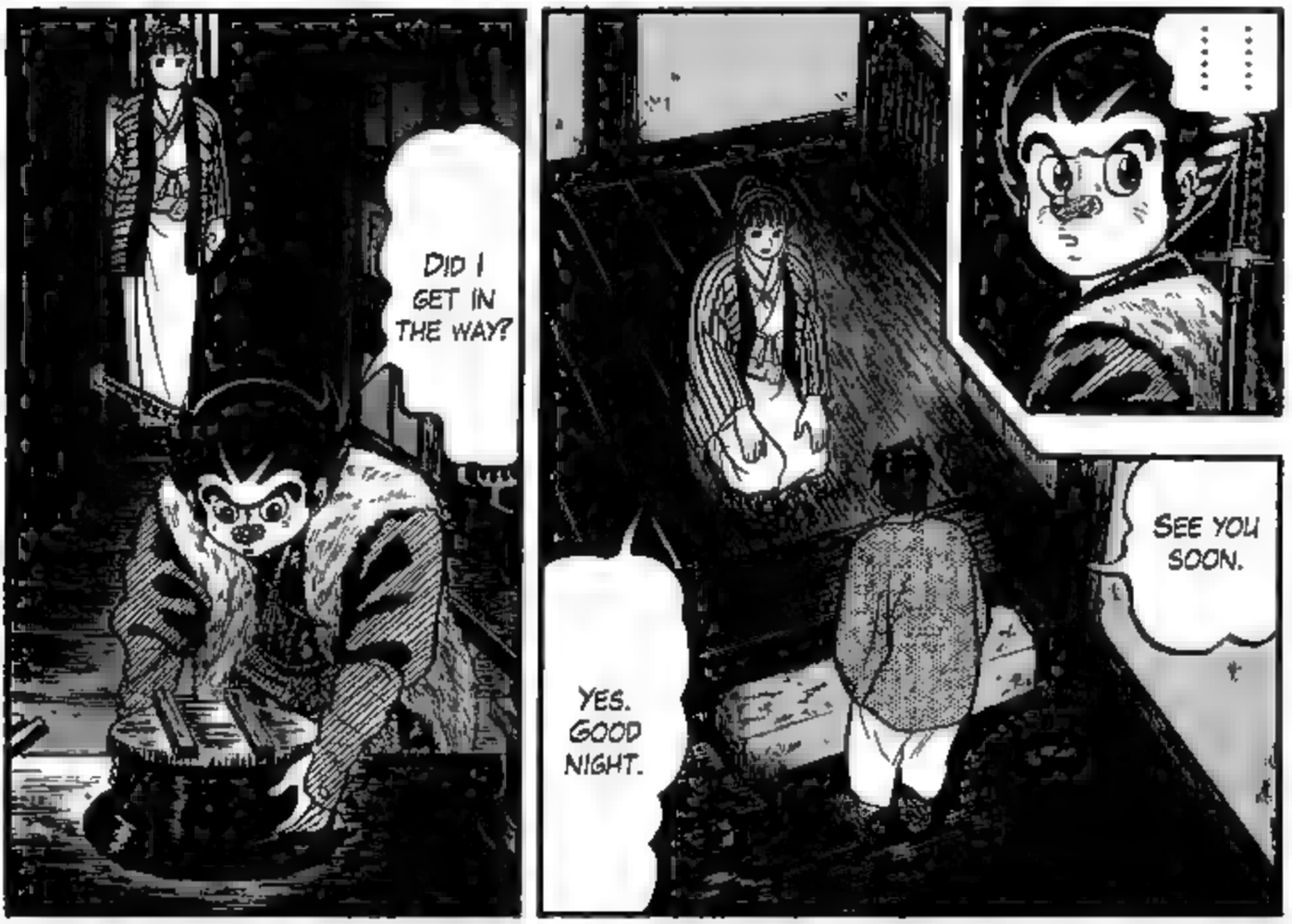
HE'S TOBIZARU...HOW SHOULD I PUT IT...HE'S A FRIEND...OR PERHAPS I SHOULD SAY A COMRADE...

THE ADMINISTRATOR OF THE GOLD MINE FOR THE SHOGUNATE, SHUNJIRO-DONO, IS HERE!

.....
TOBIZARU.... HE MADE THOSE LOUD NOISES INTENTIONALLY...

.....

I'LL HAPPILY ACCEPT IT!
THANK YOU VERY MUCH!
I ONLY CAME HERE TO GIVE YOU THAT!
THEN... I'LL JUST EXCUSE MYSELF.


DID I GET IN THE WAY?
.....
SEE YOU SOON.
YES. GOOD NIGHT.

I FELT... A LITTLE RELIEVED...
NOT AT ALL!
.....
NIGHT-NIGHT.
SORRY ABOUT THAT.

……

……

……

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WHAT HEAVY SNOW-FALL!
WHY DON'T YOU WAIT UNTIL IT EASES UP A BIT, SHUNJIRO-DONO?
NO.
TAKING THIS LIGHTLY WOULD BE INEXCUS-ABLE!
I HAVE TO BE DILIGENT IN ALL MY DUTIES!

I'M VERY IMPRESSED TO SEE HOW EVERYTHING IS GOING ALONG, EVERYONE.

IT'S ALL TO BUILD AN IDEAL COUNTRY!
SOMETHING NEVER SEEN BEFORE IN ALL HISTORY!
RIGHT!
WE'RE GOING TO BRING IT ABOUT! WITHOUT FAIL!

HAHA! SHUNJIRO-DONO'S FERVENT SPEECHES ALWAYS LIGHT A FLAME IN OUR HEARTS!
QUITE!
.....

THEN I'LL SEE YOU LATER.

AHH!
SUCH JOY.. THAT A MAN CAN FEEL!

HAHAHA.
GUAHA HAHA!

I HAD HER PICKED UP. SHE'LL BE HERE SOON.
WELL THEN... NEXT IS AZUMI-HIME..

THEY HAVE THEIR OWN NAMES,
TO THESE SEVEN MEN.
I WANT TO INTRO-DUCE YOU
AZUMI-HIME.

I WANT YOU TO REMEMBER THEM BY THAT NAME!
BUT WHEN THEY ARE ALL TOGETHER, THEY ARE CALLED THE RASETSUGARASU.

.....
.....
THIS LITTLE GIRL...IS THE FAMED AZUMI!?

I IMPLORE OF YOU TO FORGIVE THEM AND HAVE PITY FOR THEIR SITUATION.
WHILE IT MAY BE RUDE,
MOREOVER, THEY HAVE THEIR OWN REASONING, BUT NONE OF THEM WISH TO SHOW THEIR FACES.

SHE CAN'T POSSIBLY BE THIS GIRL..
THE AZUMI THEY CLAIM ANNIHILATED THAT GROUP OF BANDITS AT THE POST TOWN ALL ON HER OWN!?

THEY SLAUGHTERED ALL THE GUARDS AT THE BORDERS.
THEY'RE ALL VERY BRUTAL AND SKILLED.
THEY'VE BROUGHT IN SEVEN MEN FROM THE OUTSIDE.
THANKS TO YOU, I WAS ABLE TO MENTALLY PREPARE FOR THIS.
THANK YOU, TOBI-ZARU.

I'M AZUMI.
NICE TO MEET YOU.

WHO WOULD SAY SUCH A THING...?
THERE ARE SOME WHO ARE SAYING THAT YOU BEING RELATED TO THE LORD IS SOMETHING OF A.. BLATANT LIE...
YOU KNOW, AZUMI-HIME..

THOSE OVER THERE.

KAGARI-DONO, HATSUNE-DONO, UTSUBO-DONO!
!!
SO THEY REALLY WERE CAPTURED!

DOES IT...
WHAT COULD IT MEAN!?
THEY DON'T SEEM TIED UP..
NO...

JUST LIKE THEY SAY! WHAT DID THEY DO?
YES, IT'S A LIE!
AZUMI-HIME?

SO THAT YOU CAN LIVE ON IN PEACE!
SO I CAME HERE ON ORDERS FROM TENKAI-SAMA TO ASSIST AND HELP SO THAT NO SECRETS WERE LEAKED OUT...
IF THE HIGHEST OFFICIALS DISCOVERED THE SITUATION OF THIS FIEF, OBVIOUSLY, IT WOULD BE DESTROYED

WHAT SAY YOU!?
WITH THIS MOTIVE, I FEEL I AM IN ABSOLUTELY NO POSITION TO THREATEN YOUR INTERESTS!
HAHA HAHA
HEHEHE HEHEH
HAHA..
HUHUHU
HAHAHAHA...

FOR THIS GOAL FOR A LONG TIME BEFORE I GOT HERE, RIGHT!?
KAGARI-DONO, UTSUBO-DONO, HATSUNE-SAN, YOU'VE BEEN WORKING
IS THAT NOT SO?!

.....

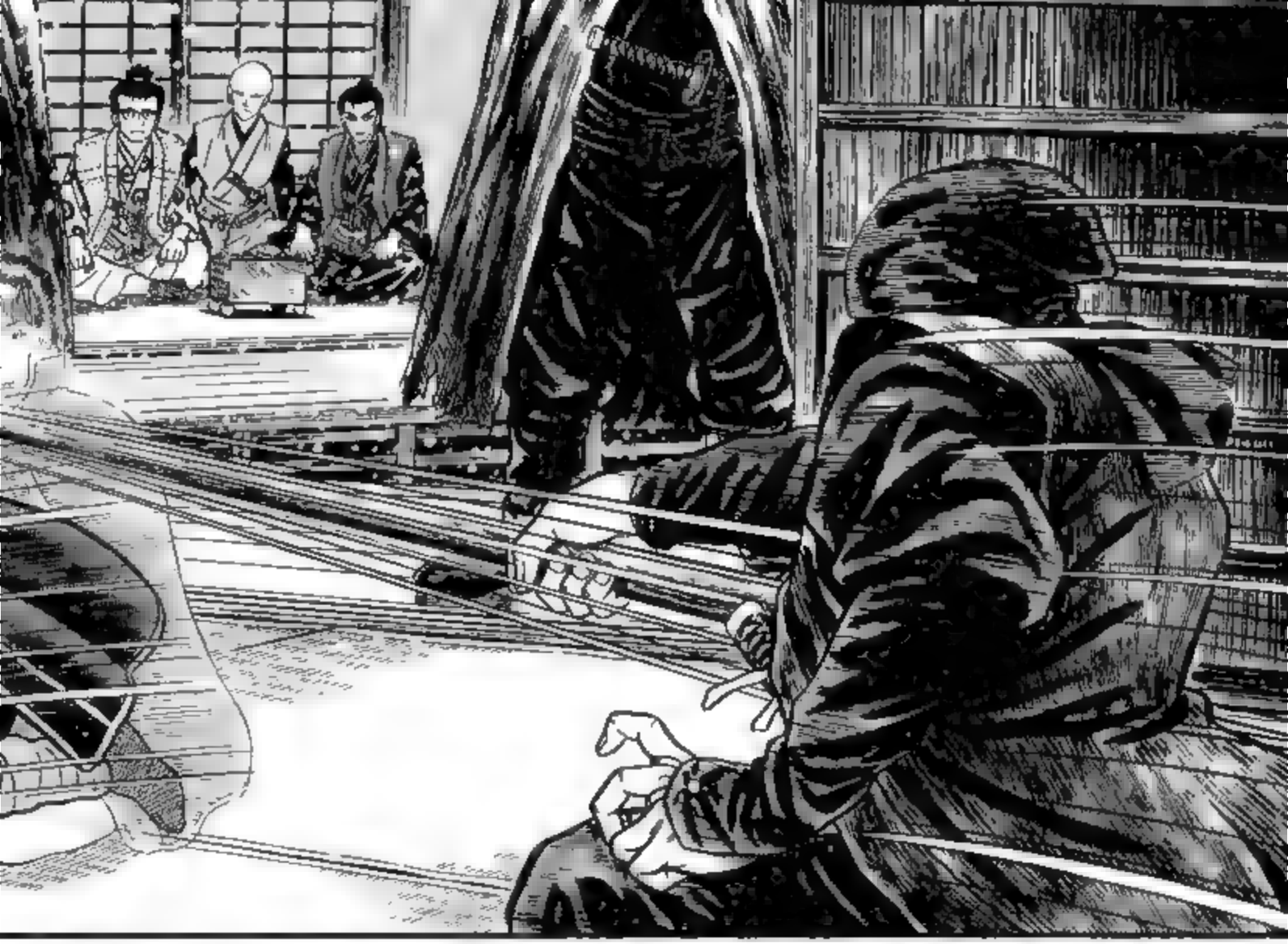
!!

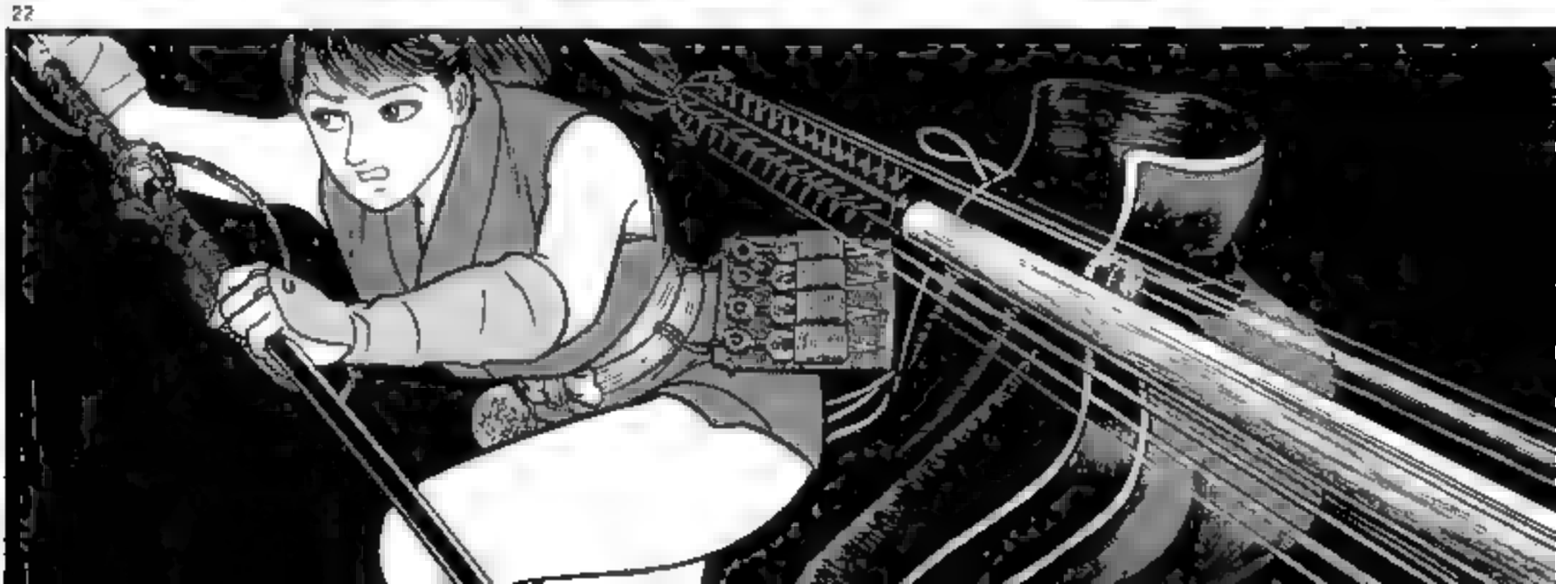
WHAT'S WRONG?
.....

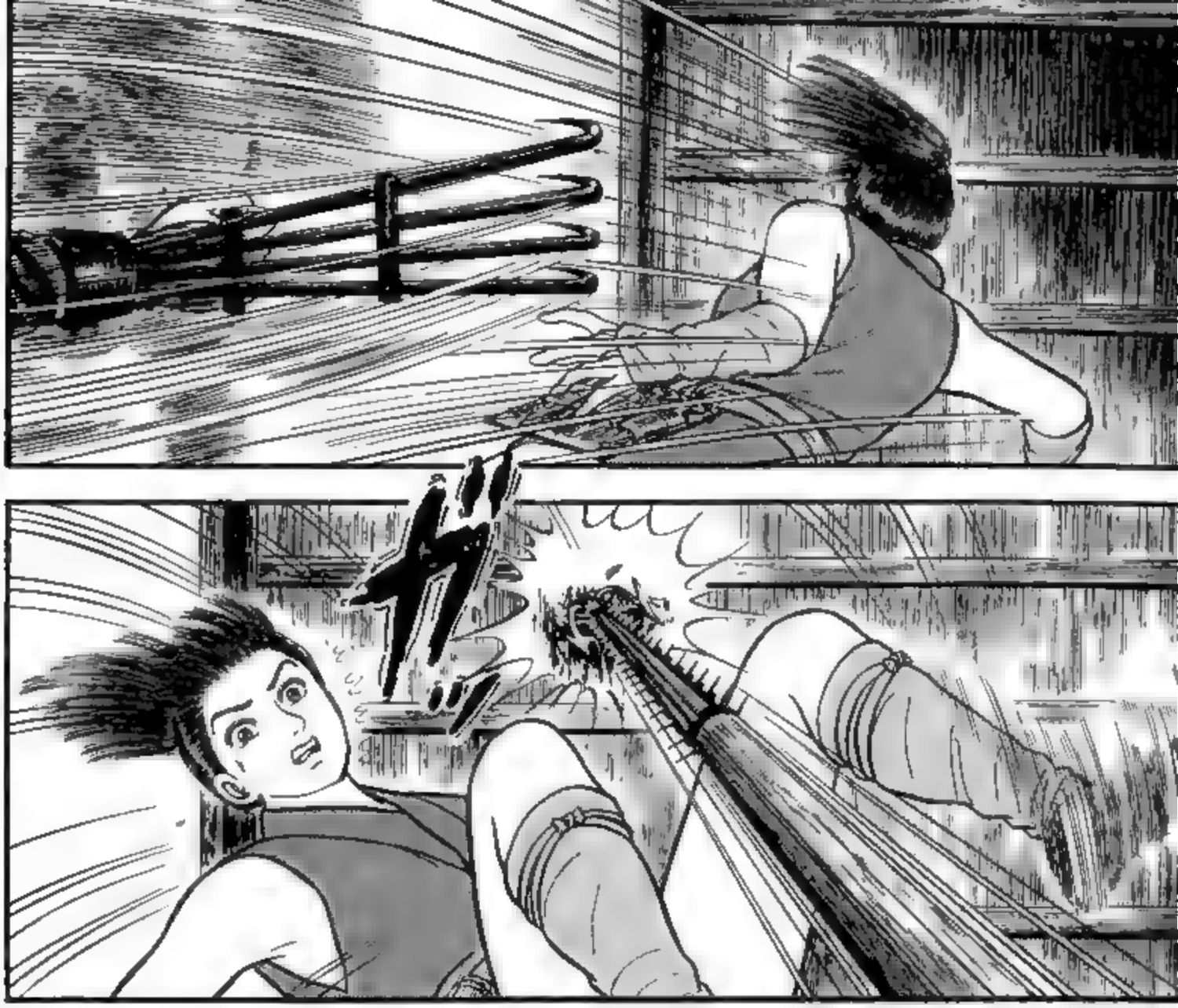
YOU SAY YOU WANT SOME KIND OF TEST TO SEE IF SHE'S REALLY THE AZUMI WHO SLAUGHTERED THOSE BANDITS?
YES.
BUT THAT YOUNG GIRL...
IF SHE'S REALLY A PRINCESS...WOULD IT BE PROBLEMATIC IF WE END UP KILLING HER...?

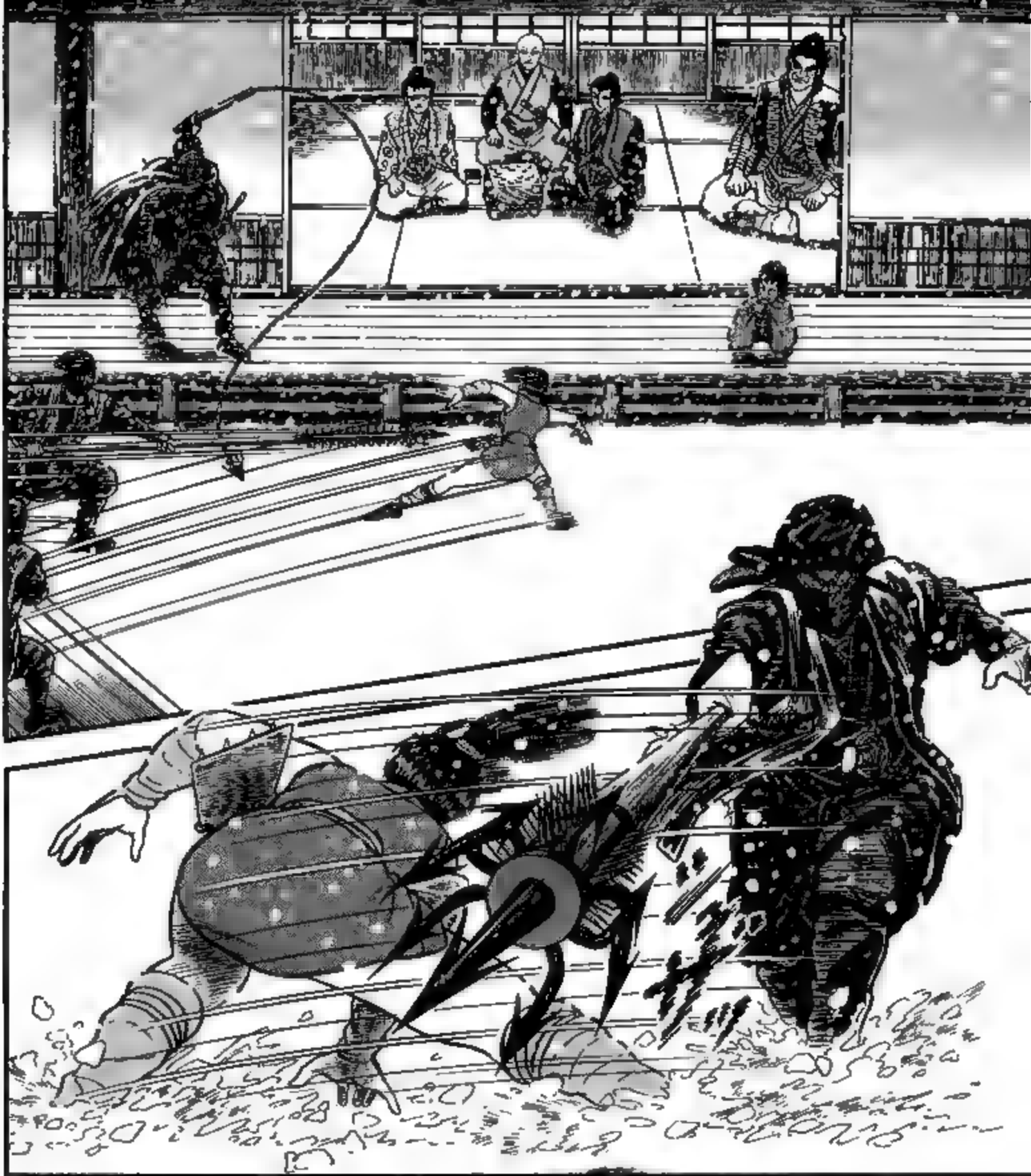
NO. IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE.
BUT IF SHE TURNS OUT TO BE THIS AZUMI FROM THE RUMORS...
IT COULD BE YOU RISKING INJURY OR WORSE...
HMPH.
HAHAHA.
HOHO HOHO.

WE'VE NEVER BEEN DEFEATED EVEN ONCE!
YOU JUST SIT BACK AND WATCH
UNTIL THE TEST IS DONE.









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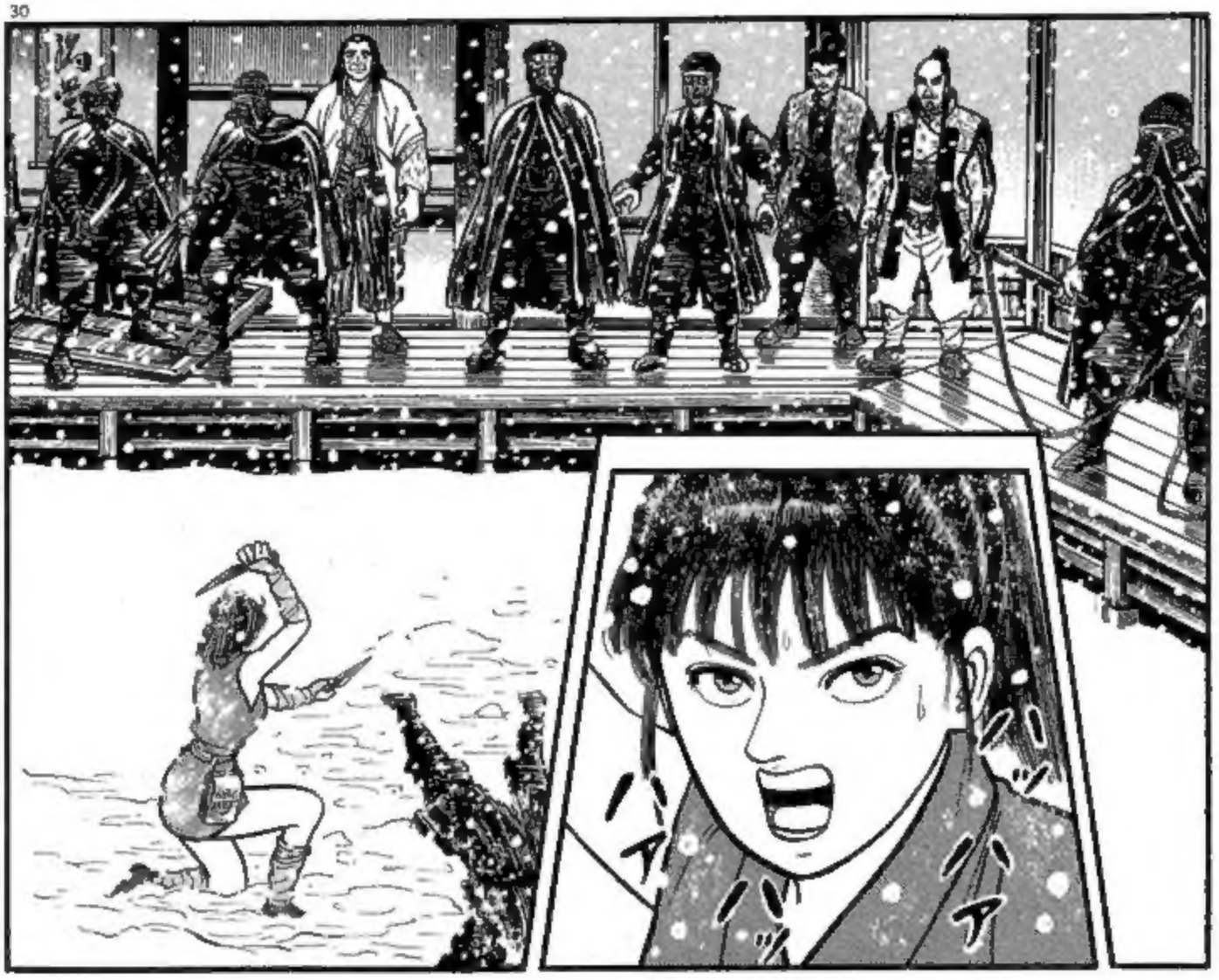

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